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The HAUNTED HEART

AGNES & EGERTON CASTLE

THE HAUNTED HEART





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"'Ian, this is Miss Oenone.'"

[PAGE 122]

THE HAUNTED HEART

BY

AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

AUTHORS OF "THE PRIDE OF JENNICO,"
"ROSE OF THE WORLD," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
C. H. TAFFS

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"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death. . . .

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

SONG OF SONGS.

[redacted]

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
"'Ian, this is Miss Oenone.'" . . . . *Frontispiece*	
"'Behold, Mummie, the future Lady Stronaven.'" . .	160
"'Since it is only I who suffer . . . was I not right?'"	266
"His glance . . . fixed itself upon her face with a most profound and vivid expression." . , .	378



THE HAUNTED HEART

PROLOGUE

The glen lies shimmering in the hot August sunshine, clothed in the purple of heather, as in a royal mantle. The airs are full of aromatic pungency; for, down yonder in the ferny hollows, the silver-gray bracken has a scent of its own to mingle with the honey sweetness of the higher heather; and where the moor slopes abruptly toward the dark frontier of the woodland, and the burn runs more lazily, spreading into pools, the bog-myrtle grows thick amid the rank grass, and sends up wild, incomparable incense to the sky.

Upwards the glen reaches toward jutting crags, heights barren even of heather; a circular group of pines dominating the moorlands stands nobly in dark isolation. Midway between crag and grove, the ruins of a small chapel, open to the winds and the heavens, clings to the hillside. It subsists, a monument of destruction as Covenanting zeal left it in the days of the long struggle—roofless, windowless. A bush of gorse thrusts its spines between the shattered flags, where once the altar stood; a rowan tree flings its branches, red clustered, through the archway that was a door. Sweet thyme and other delicate mountain herbs have taken root between the wall stones within, and without the brambles clasp the buttresses with jealous embrace.



[illegible] that overarches the four
[illegible] inside them, looks up and
[illegible] ever been in—not St. Giles
[illegible] dark richness; not St. Mungo of
[illegible] gloom—has seemed to him so

[illegible] his kind, the boy is "making be-
[illegible] bush, with its candle-flame flowers,
[illegible] made cross; and on the ground in
[illegible] coat, carefully folded, and there-
[illegible] peeled hazel wand, and another, shorter.
[illegible] he kneels, sitting back on his heels; the
[illegible] brown, bare legs. His arms are folded
[illegible] . . . a dreamy, ugly, thin, wiry
[illegible] so deeply absorbed in his imaginings that
[illegible] on the turf without, and muffled laughter,
[illegible] his attention. But a shout rouses him.
[illegible] laughing child faces look in upon him, through the

[illegible] he'd be here!" says the girl. And:

"What kind of a fool game are you playing now, [illegible] all by yourself?" asks the boy.

They come in together, the girl and the boy. A beautiful, audacious looking youngster, this; tall for his twelve years. The tartan swings with grace about the lithe, sinewy limbs; the cap, with its little chieftain feather, is saucily cocked on the close black curls. Between thick black lashes, blue eyes flash out of a sunburnt face with an almost fierce intelligence. The whole personality is already marked with the unconscious imperiousness of one born to rule and by nature formed to lead.

PROLOGUE

His companion resembles him in the darkness of the hair that falls, a mane, over her shoulders; in the slender elasticity of figure; in the vivid loveliness of the small tanned face—but her eyes are of a mysterious purple. The likeness is so striking that few would guess the kinship to be two generations removed.

"Jimmy," she says, "is always going off by himself to play. I call it very selfish."

The boy squatting on his knees turns a blushing, confused countenance:

"I'm awfully sorry, Ianny. . . . You see, Morna, I couldn't help it. I had to be by myself . . . for this."

The young Master of Stronaven hops over the stones into the chapel, closely followed by the girl. He squats down beside his brother, and looks with curiosity from the folded coat to the figure whose hands are still piously crossed.

"What is it this time?"

"I'm *Perceval*, whom *Arthur* and his knighthood called 'the Pure.'"

"*Perceval*—?" echoes Morna. She sits in her turn, on a big stone, and, chin in hand, gazes reflectively at the speaker. She has never heard of *Sir Perceval*—but the boys have been reading the Idylls of the King. The little Master's face lights up:

"Have you seen the Holy Grail?" His voice is rather awed. He glances at the blue sky and then at the cross: it does not seem to him at all impossible that this place, so still and wonderful and scented in the sunshine, should hold a vision.

"Oh, not yet, Ian!" answers the other in a reverent,

shocked voice. "I'm not a knight yet, you see. I was going through my vigil. And there's my armor"—he points to the folded coat—"and my lance and my true blade," looking at the wands.

It does not, however, enter into Ian's scheme to sit and look on. He leaps up and seizes one of the wands, brandishing it aloft.

"If you're *Perceval*, I'm *Sir Galahad!* I have seen the Grail—I, *Galahad.* I am a knight already. See my white armor! 'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,' said *Arthur* when he dubbed me knight!" He springs across the chapel and catches Morna by the hand. "And you cut all your hair 'clean from your forehead; all that wealth of hair' to make me a sword-belt. And you say, 'My knight, my love, my Light of Heaven'—"

But the girl pushes him off vigorously.

"I'm not going to cut my hair! I should be horrid!"

"Then I can't be your knight and your love."

She hesitates.

"You wouldn't love me if my hair was cut off. You wouldn't want to marry me; I should be a fright!"

"*Galahad* can't marry, you silly!" quoth the little Master with scornful indignation.

"He couldn't even love anybody, really," puts in James, dreamily. "He is consecrated. And you're a nun—'a holy maid, with knees of adoration wearing the stones.' You ought to kneel, Morna."

"I won't—I won't!" Her voice trembles on tears. "It's a silly game, anyhow! Don't play at that, Ianny darling, if you can't love me!"

"No!" cries Ian decisively. "I'll be *Launcelot.* He was

a fighting one! And you shall be *Guinevere*—they loved each other all right, anyhow, Jimmy."

He takes hold of a long strand of hair and pulls the girl remorselessly towards him, that he may kiss her face. She struggles, flushing like a rose, half-angry, half-pleased.

"*Guinevere* was *Arthur's* queen," says the small *Perceval*—gravely, still sitting on his heels, "and yours was a guilty love, you know."

"Oh, shut up, Jimmy!" cries *Launcelot*. And *Guinevere* settles the matter by flinging her arms about her knight's neck and exclaiming:

"We'll play it's not guilty!"

"Yes—I'll kill *Arthur* and marry you!" cries young Ian MacIvor, as, brandishing again his brother's wand, he makes a fierce pass, strikes him in the center of his little thin chest and rolls him over. "There—you're *Arthur*, and you're dead. Come, Morna . . . or that greedy Millie will have gobbled all the cakes."

As the younger brother rises, rubbing the dust from his little brown knees, and protesting anxiously the while that *Launcelot* could not have killed *Arthur—Launcelot*, Knight of the Round Table, sworn in fealty!—the other two have already dashed out into the sunshine and are skipping down the hill together.

Hand in hand they go, the girl's hair flying behind her, the boy leaping like a young deer. James looks after them wistfully. Slower-spirited, infinitely less nimble of body, ever lost in some dream or other, he is accustomed thus to be left behind. He picks up his coat, casts a glance at the spot where he had knelt in such mystic content, and then,

whooping, sets off at a canter towards the pine grove where a gypsy tea is waiting.

A squat, sturdy, kilted lad comes running past him:

"Hech, Mr. James, you maun na stop me. I'm to bring mair cakes—Miss Millie would have the basket unpackit!"

And little Duncan MacVurish, the Master's foster-brother, pursues his steady trot downwards.

He will have a hot run of it through the wood, and up the park, to the castle, the towers of which can be seen in the distance rising sternly, almost like a menace above the massy green, against the blue of this summer sky.

Stronaven—a place built for war and pride, held in pride and war through long centuries; nest of a proud, warlike race; scene, in bygone savage days, of many unlovely deeds of rapine, cruelty and reprisal; witness, too, of heroism unrecorded in chronicles, of gallantries unnumbered, of loyalties unrecognized and to the death! The ancient house, originally a mere fighter's stronghold, enlarged, enriched and beautified through the more prosperous ages, has remained in the hands of the race of its founder; and they that play in the sun-hot heather yonder are the last of its children. In their blood runs, unknown to them, a fierce strain of love and hate; in their innocent hearts lurk unsuspected ardors. Many strands of the complicated tissue of their fate have already been drawn across the loom—by tradition and inheritance. The weaving of the web, its color and design, lies still in their own unconscious hands.



BOOK I

"And they that could speak for the castle made long moan. Ah! Ah! for the house and its lord! Ah! for the marriage, for the memories of love!"

Eschylus.

CHAPTER I

THE Honorable and Reverend James MacIvor—commonly known amongst his parishioners as Father Mac—had just said Mass and had begun his thanksgiving. He was kneeling, in his worn cassock, in the sanctuary of the small tin building, which was all the mission afforded. The service had been attended by the usual sparse congregation—some old, groaning Irishwomen, the children of his catechism class, a few devout young men and women from the poorer shops, and his one convert who was also sacristan and acolyte. This last, an elderly man, with an anxious gray-bearded countenance, was heavily crossing and recrossing the space between the priest's fixed gaze and the poor altar as, with painstaking reverence, he put by the sacred furniture.

When the altar-cloth—moss-green braided with yellow, a handsome bazaar article, the gift of a charitable nun—was spread to a nicety, Rab Brodie heavily genuflected and went down the little chapel out to his daily work. The man, a carpenter, was a good fellow, a countryman of his own, and James MacIvor's right hand; besides being the first spiritual child born to him, in this poor mission; but the priest drew an involuntary sigh of relief as the ponderous footsteps retreated. It was the hour of

solitude for which he yearned every morning; the hour of compensation for all the toil of a life of recurrent labor and disappointment; the hour of preparation for the new day's effort. As the swing-door opened and fell back with a thud, it let in for an instant, as upon the raising of a sluice, the outer uproar of the East End street; and then the desired inner silence surrounded him.

After a few minutes, however, to his surprise, the turmoil of the outer world rushed in upon him again—the intermingling of raucous shouts, the clatter of hoofs, the endless grinding of wheels—and then the door was slammed to, and precipitate footfalls came up the aisle. These steps were accompanied by a sound so unusual in his poverty-stricken chapel, the tap of high heels, that the priest rose from his knees and turned round.

At sight of the advancing figure, his pale face assumed a whimsical expression; amusement, annoyance, affection. It was the kind of expression that, if Lady Martindale had been an observant person, she would have frequently noticed on the countenance of those upon whom she made her unexpected onslaughts. Her brother hastily lifted his hand as a loud exclamation of greeting burst from her:

"Oh, James, James . . . !"

She fell silent; the tale of ominous import, the flood of words which had been rising to her lips, checked in full tide.

Her air of a child rebuked sat quaintly on a fine dominating personality. With eyes growing round, she pursed her lips and nodded solemnly as Father MacIvor whispered that they could not talk in the chapel, but that

he would take her instantly over to his house. She looked about her as she meekly followed him. Awe, the liveliest curiosity, dismay not altogether unmixed with fear, were stamped upon her comely, rose-fresh visage.

"Oh, James, Oh, James . . . !" she cried once more, the instant the door fell behind them; and the thought uppermost was, as usual with her, the first to find vent: "What a dreadful little place! Oh dear, I must say, they might have put you at the new Cathedral! What? Or at least in some pretty country parish, with a dear little old church—and a sweet little green churchyard and a village and all that. What? Oh, James! It's bad enough your being a Catholic priest—Oh, what, dear boy? Jimsy, Jimsy, yes, I've got the most dreadful news for you—what a horrid noise! Do they always shout like this? And why do they stare at us like that? What, Jimsy dear? . . . Yes, very well, I'll wait a bit till we get to your house . . . Oh, dear!"

The ejaculation was expressive of Lady Martindale's surcharged feelings. It was promptly followed by another, in a higher pitched tone of distress:

"Oh, dear, Jimsy, do you live here?"

Her question was answered by the violent opening of the door belonging to the miserable one-storied house before which the priest, silent under his sister's torrent of speech, now halted. A slatternly woman with disheveled gray hair under an antique widow's bonnet appeared on the threshold:

"And indeed, your reverence—" She broke off, one astounded eye—for the other was withered in its socket—fixed upon the fine lady, her master's companion.

"Yes, I know I'm late, Mary," said the priest gently. "But Brodie was kept—"

"And indeed that same Brodie—" The housekeeper's comment dropped into space; the single eye was still appraising with something akin to indignation.

"My sister," said Father Mac, in the same voice of extreme kindness. "I daresay she'd like a cup of tea with me —would you, Milly?"

"A cup of tea?" Lady Martindale's loud possessive tones rang through the narrow passage and seemed to echo then through the forlorn house, as if, small as it was, it was very empty. "Tea, Jimsy! But I am starving! I have not had my breakfast. I suppose you can give me breakfast. What?"

"The kettle's been boiling on me," said the housekeeper doubtfully. "But, bedad, there's no bacon beyond the bit I've just cooked for yourself, Father!"

"Oh, that will do, that will do!" So saying, James MacIvor hastily drew his sister through a small door on the right of the passage; then, putting his head out again, called after his servant as she retreated grumbling and shaking her head towards the kitchen, whence evidence of the rasher in question was mercilessly issuing: "Bring the pot of marmalade, and run at once and get a fresh loaf and a quarter-pound of butter."

"Is it your Friday marmalade?" The door was closed upon her remonstrance.

"Well, Milly, and what's happened now?"

Father MacIvor had not anticipated, in spite of such portentous announcements, any very appalling communication. All who knew Millicent Martindale, knew her as

the most erratic and irresponsible of beings. In her extraordinary physical exuberance she was unable to realize that, to the more sensitive organization of others, her tendency to surprise visits, at extremely early hours, was apt to be trying. And while it never dawned upon her that the houses of others should not be willingly opened to her whenever she chose to penetrate, neither did it seem to strike her that there were any inclosures of thought, of feeling, which anyone could wish to keep inaccessible to her. Morally and physically she plunged into privacies with a firm tread. But such was her warm heart, her equable temper, her guileless unconsciousness of offense, that it could safely be said she had not an enemy in the world. People spoke of her with laughter, never with unkindness.

Her brother's eyes were full of affection as he turned upon her; but the smile died on his lips as she answered his cheerful question with a loud wail:

"Oh, Jimsy, Jimsy—poor Ian!"

The man's face had looked white and tired enough already; at these words it grew blanched and drawn, like that of one struck with sudden illness. If there were a being on earth to whom James' heart-strings were tied, it was his brother Ian, up in the old place in the gray north.

"Ian—" he faltered. "Ill?"

"Oh, worse, worse—" she groaned.

Then as, groping with thin hands for the support of the table he fell into his chair, she cried almost angrily:

"Oh, no, no—not that! How silly! How could you think of such horrible things! Not dead—not even ill. Good gracious, don't look like that! Oh, you've had no

breakfast. What! Not even a cup of tea? How silly of you! What do you say? What—good gracious, Jimsy, let me call that creature with the eye."

"No, no," said James MacIvor in his turn. A faint flush succeeded the pallor which had alarmed Lady Martindale. "Don't keep me on tenter-hooks any more Milly. Tell me what is wrong with Ian. Tell me this minute!"

The note of authority quelled her erratic impulsiveness. It was part of her childish quality that she was singularly amenable to authority.

"I'd have liked to prepare you," she said meekly. And blind to the smile that he could not repress, she proceeded in the same subdued manner: "It's Morna—she's gone! Left him! Bolted! What did you say?"

"Oh, nonsense, I don't believe it," he exclaimed, and drew a long breath of relief.

His sister's impetuosity broke forth again in a shriek:

"But it's true, I tell you! She's bolted with Bonci—that Pietro Bonci, the creature, what's his name, who was painting her portrait!"

"Oh, Paolo Concini, you mean!" The Father smiled again. Now, he must have his cup of tea. He got up. "Mary is late," he said. "Oh, I remember, I sent her out, poor thing. If you'll excuse me, Milly, I'll just go as far as the kitchen."

She expostulated, almost with tears:

"You're mad, James! You're mad! I tell you Morna's—"

"Morna? Oh, nonsense!" He turned at the door. "Sit down again, and take off those furs—such furs to be wearing in such a place as St. Michael's; I wonder you

weren't hooted at!" The whimsical smile lifted one corner of his thin lips. "Your fine hat is crooked, too." His smile broadened; he disappeared into the narrow, dark passage; when had he ever known Milly with her hat straight?

CHAPTER II

LADY MARTINDALE sent a protesting "Oh, James, how silly!" after the retreating figure. The tears of vexation overflowed her eyes. She was of the type, the good fighting, vital type, in whom the sorrows of life evoke anger. With her, someone had ever to be blamed when things went wrong. And now, much was wrong. Everybody was tiresome in the extreme. She had never wanted James to "turn"; and to become a priest at that! But having done so, there was no sense in his burying himself in a hole of this description. Ugh! What a room, what a place! What a street! She'd no idea there was anything in England like this. There oughtn't to be. Heaven knew people were taxed enough! . . . Now someone was crying fried fish under the window! The creature was looking in at her. Did James buy fried fish out of a barrow, she wondered, and shuddered.

"Oh James!"

The priest stood in the narrow doorway; tall and lean and smiling. He had a brown-ware teapot in one hand and a plate crowned with a new loaf in the other. His smile, however, was a little rueful:

"I am afraid the bacon is all burnt away. It is my fault

for not seeing to it while Mary was out. But I found a box of sardines. Come in, Mary."

He stepped back to let his housekeeper pass him; and she sidled to the table, maneuvering her battered tin tray in the exiguous spaces and balancing it precariously whilst dumping its contents noisily one after the other; her eye meanwhile seeking and averting itself from the figure of the fine lady with a movement so swift and restless that it was almost a jerk.

"Thank you," said her master.

"I wonder," cried the visitor, her irritation exploding as the door closed upon the servant, "why you kow-tow like that to that creature without the eye. She isn't even clean!"

"Poor Mary—" said Father Mac, absently. His gaze was fixed upon the letter that was uppermost of the little pile that the Irishwoman had left on his plate. It bore the mark of a large black thumb, but that was not what attracted his attention; he had recognized the writing of his brother Ian.

"Why you should think I have come all this way with a cock-and-bull story I can't imagine, considering it was Edith who wrote to tell me—Edith Inglis, she's not likely to have invented the story, is she? She's a Roman like yourself, too. You've always thought the light shone out of her. I am sure we all thought it was she who turned you—Oh, dear, James, you're not listening!" cried Lady Martindale, interrupting herself in the middle of an involved sentence. "I tell you, I—What is it? What?"

He took up the letter he had been staring at, and, trying to speak cheerfully against some sudden inward

conviction of misfortune, some indefinable misery that seemed to emanate from the closed envelope:

"Why, Milly," he said, "this is from Ian himself—a better authority even than Edith Inglis."

"Oh," exclaimed Lady Martindale. The color rushed into her pink and white face; she remained staring with round eyes and round mouth. She wanted to run away from that letter. She was afraid. It was almost as bad as meeting Ian himself. That to Ian, of all people, such an abominable thing should have happened!

Then her mood took another twist. James was a long time, standing with his back to her at the window—she wondered what Ian had said: as if she had been likely to make a mistake!

"Well?" she exclaimed, and there was almost a note of triumph in her voice.

The man turned, came in silence to the table, and sat down. He looked at her unseeingly, his eyes seemed to have sunk in their orbit, the light in them was extinguished.

"May I see?" Lady Martindale stretched out her plump, jeweled hand.

"I think not." He spoke heavily, and, putting his elbow on the table, leaned his head upon his hand as if the shock had almost stopped the power of thought.

"Ah—well—" She drew her chair scrapingly towards the table. "There isn't any use in my making myself ill." She took up the teapot and helped herself. "And you, too, James—my poor boy, this milk is half water! Do you think the creature with the eye is honest? Or is it the milkman? James, you must have a cup, too. You look

positively gray. Oh dear, there is that fried fish bawling again! Good gracious!" "How anyone can live in such a place as this, much less pray! It would be my idea of Hell. Drink your tea, James."

The priest raised his head.

"Didn't I tell you it was true," cried his sister again, answering that stricken look. "Of course it's an awful shock. But there's no good in making oneself ill, because Morna—my goodness, Morna! . . . These are quite good sardines—I must say I do like fresh bread. This is quite good bread."

James MacIvor was never one to whom speech came easy. An intense shrinking reserve was his dominant characteristic. He had not felt able to give, even to the eyes of a sister, kindly and well-meaning as he knew her to be, the lines in which his best-beloved here below, the head of his race and his nearest in blood, announced the tragedy of a dishonored name and a shattered home. He would have yielded his own existence to cover up the ugly thing that had come into their lives. To discuss it now, however, to hear Milly's crude comment, he could not avoid.

"It is true," he said slowly. Then, to put off the evil moment, drank the tea she had poured out for him, rose and cut a slice of bread. He had thrust the letter between the buttons of his cassock. He knew it was not safe to leave letters within the reach of that guilelessly indiscreet hand.

"Does he ask you to go to him, Jimmy?"

"No, no," repeated Father MacIvor. "He says, on the contrary, he had rather neither of us went."

"Oh, but you'll have to go!" dismayed, cried Lady Mar-

tindale, with her mouth full. "Why, isn't that what I've come for—to make you go to him at once? You're the person. What? And Edith Inglis says so. She says I'm to break it to you—she'd have wired herself, only she didn't like to—too great a shock! But she says you must go. Why, it isn't safe. He might blow his brains out. Oh, my goodness, James, we're all rather queer in our family, you know! What with poor papa, and your turning Roman, and Ian's tempers and everything! I've looked out your train, the two-forty. You can catch it quite comfortably."

The priest sat staring absently at the untasted slice of bread upon his plate. Once or twice he lifted his thin, half-folded hand, and struck the table softly. He was lost in thought.

"I don't think I can get away today," he said at last. "Certainly not so early."

Lady Martindale, who had fished the last sardine out of the tin and begun skinning it, looked up with sudden anger.

"Well, I never could have believed you'd have been so heartless! I always thought you cared a lot for Ian—even though you are a priest. Of course I know you take any amount of silly vows. But I never thought they made you swear not to be decent to your own family. Of course I know you can never marry and have children and that, but I should have thought it would be your duty to try and prevent your only brother from committing suicide."

"He won't do that!"

"What?" Lady Martindale's favorite interjection, which she contrived to make expressive of all her different moods, was now drawn out in astonishment and dis-

approval. "Now, how can you possibly tell? Edith Inglis says—"

"Ian has no thought of suicide," said her brother decisively. "He is—" but the priest arrested himself. He would not give to anyone, least of all to his talkative sister, his grounds for this assertion. Perhaps no one need ever know, except himself and Ian, what it was that the husband in his first wrath was planning.

"Well—I think that anyone with a grain of feeling or common humanity would try and prevent Ian going on like a maniac. And even if he doesn't shoot himself, he ought to be stopped shooting the animals and breaking the furniture. I am sure Theophilus would have bought that horse of Morna's for me. Such a nice beast, quite up to my weight, too—" Here her mind flew off at a tangent. "James," she exclaimed with a sharpness of attack that was like the unexpected pointing of a pistol, "of course all this is ridiculous nonsense! Quite absurd, quite absurd! How can Ian and Morna live away from each other? It's just an infatuation. What? We must hush it up. James, we've got to bring them together again. Someone must go after Morna, and Ian must just forgive her. It's only an Italian after all, whom nobody knows. Good gracious —and nowadays—women are always forgiving their husbands things. . . . I'm sure if I were to be hard on Theophilus—" She brought herself up short, a flood of color dyeing her face.

Her brother raised his eyes. The inner light had come back to them. Good, honest Milly! To think that from these irresponsible lips the voice of God should have first reached him. All had been black about him since the news

of this calamity had overtaken him; there had not been a ray of light for guidance or consolation. But now—of course there was the road, the divine road—forgiveness!

"Have you got Mrs. Inglis' letter with you? Will you give it me? Is there any clue as to where they—" he corrected himself, "as to where Morna has gone?"

"Morna and that Pietro creature?" she blurted out, ruthlessly. "Oh, to Italy, I suppose! Sure to have gone to Italy. He's an Italian. Anyhow, that's where lovers always go. What?" Her brother's eyes were fixed upon her so sternly that she crimsoned and pouted like a sulky child. "Well, dear James, since she's gone with him, you know—" her voice trailed off indistinguishably.

James MacIvor sat still fixing her with those luminous eyes which alone redeemed his angular, worn face from utter plainness. The sternness in them gradually merged into far-away contemplation. This sister of his, handsome, sumptuous, erratic, frivolous, undisciplined—how many a time he had revolved anxious thoughts about her! Yet there she sat, happy wife and mother; passing apparently unscathed through the whirl of dissipation in the fastest society in the world; with no specially strong feeling to keep her straight, no innate fastidiousness, certainly no guiding sense of religion. Something had protected, something upheld her. His outlook was sufficiently of the things spiritual to say to himself: the grace of God! But, he knew the force of the earthly motives well enough to add: with all her follies, Milly is too shrewd, too fond of her own comfort. And there she sat, in honor, without a cloud in the clear blue of her eyes, or a shadow on that dormant soul, while Morna—Morna! . . . Once again a

sensation of utter disbelief raised a barrier against the mounting wave of shame and sorrow.

"I don't believe it—" he said out loud. The sternness flashed back into his glance. "Oh! she's left him, I don't doubt. But, in that way? Morna?—never until I have proof. What has Ian done?"

"James, you are silly! Of course, I know, dear boy, it does seem odd. But there it is—everybody knows she's gone off with that painter. There, read Edith's letter! I'll leave it with you." She drew the bulging envelope from her embroidered bag and flung it to him. "There's sheets and sheets. You'll go up to Ian, won't you? I must go home. Theophilus is always so annoyed if I'm out for breakfast. Is that clock right? Oh dear, he will be quite foaming!" Here Lady Martindale made an effort to concentrate her wandering thoughts upon some practical conclusion. "You will go, dear boy, won't you," she went on. "Couldn't you get some of your priest friends in Italy to look up that Conci man—what? He's a holy Roman, anyhow. Really, James, since you would go over, you might do something to help! Especially as you people don't have divorce. What? What?"

The second "what" rang with a certain anxious insistence, due perhaps to the frown with which the other had greeted this last excursion of his sister's wandering mind. She rose in a hurry, gathered her sables about her, shook the crumbs from the folds of her tailor-made coat.

"Well, I must go. Will you ask the creature with the queer eyes—what do you say? No, of course, how silly! I mean with the eye—without the eye, rather. Why will you have such a horrid woman, dear! Irish, too! And

dirty. You needn't be dirty, need you? Oh, of course I didn't mean that, though I must say I don't pity you if you have such a good breakfast every morning. I wish they'd give me bread like that. Hot from the oven. So crusty! And your tea! I don't know when I've tasted such tea. Do you get it here, in this awful place. I mean St. Michael's—What?"

Again the interrogation hovered upon discomfort. Ruthlessly as Lady Martindale plunged along her own way, she had an occasional sharpness of intuition. Thus she would often answer in her own discourse the objection forming itself in her listener's mind. Now she felt that her words had once again evoked pain, and she could not imagine why. She stared with wide blue eyes.

"Morna sends me the tea."

Father MacIvor spoke slowly, with eyes cast down.

"Oh dear!" said Lady Martindale, loudly and dismally. "Well, James, are you going to ask that woman to whistle for a taxi?"

Sad at heart, as he was, the smile came back to the priest's lips.

"A taxi, Millicent! Do you think we have use for such things as taxis here?"

Her bright face clouded.

"No taxis!" Her tone was quite as tragic as it had been when prognosticating her brother's suicide. "How silly! Why didn't the man tell me? I'd have kept him. How am I to get home? Oh dear, what a silly place! You can't expect me to go home in a dray!"

The sarcasm was elicited by the rumbling past of a brewer's cart, which shook the whole little street like an

earthquake, obscured the window and filled the air with such thunderous sounds that Lady Martindale had to raise her voice to a shriek.

"You'll have to go home by train," said the priest, when, with the clatter of great hoofs on the cobbles, the dray drew into silence before the public house at the street corner. He surveyed her doubtfully. "We'll have to walk to the station. You must not mind if people make personal remarks as we go along. We are not accustomed to fine ladies in these parts. Do you never wear a veil, Milly?" he proceeded. Her luxuriant hair, never tidy at the best of times, and of the color of spun gold, broke out in a sparkling nimbus against the shade of the feathered hat at its rakish angle. Her cheeks were incarnadined with vivid color. He knew that this glory of vitality was her own heritage and not an effect of artifice. But St. Michael's is neither prone to charity in judgment or to reserve in passing it.

"Oh dear," said the visitor, for the third time. "You have a nice lot here, I must say! You don't seem to have taught them much yet—what, James?" Then her eyes snapped, as they always did when one of her elementary jokes was in process. "You don't want me to borrow one of Lucy's bonnets. Not Lucy? Oh, Mary then—you know what I mean. Well, come, James."

"What—lost your donner, Fawther!" waggishly cried one of the loafers outside the Bricklayer's Arms, as the priest slowly turned the corner back into the dismal street which held his "presbytery." He had seen his sister into the single (perpetually empty) first-class carriage of the Metropolitan. The remark provoked guffaws from the

wit's fellow-loungers. The Father sighed. It was not that the gibe disturbed him, but he never passed a public house without a sigh.

CHAPTER III

JAMES MACIVOR'S first act upon re-entering the little room, more than usually depressing in a shaft of mellow September sunshine, was to pull out the letters from his breast pocket. He stood by the window, reading them. It seemed to him that he already knew by heart those few short lines in which the Master of Stronaven laid bare his desolation and his rage. But he was driven to con them again in that futile endeavor—which every recipient of bad news knows—to wrest from the paper some further detail, some spark of hope, some explanation at least of the amazing calamity. But the words would yield nothing beyond the horrible fact. And the mystery only thickened about him.

DEAR JAMES,

Morna left me yesterday with the damned Italian. In case I should misunderstand the proceeding, she wrote a letter which makes it all more than clear. Don't let Millicent rush up here. I don't want anyone. I have plenty on hand if I am to get the divorce through this session, which I mean to do. Morna assures me that she will afford me every facility. You won't like this, I know, old man. There isn't the least use in your writing to tell me so. But, if I shock your new-found principles, may it be a slight

consolation for you to know that at least on one point we are agreed. I now believe in hell.

Yours,

IAN.

Father MacIvor's face contracted as if the pain he was enduring was actually physical. "I now believe in hell," he repeated the phrase half aloud. It was indeed as a cry from the deep where all love is turned to hate, all activity to destruction, that the message struck upon his soul. He put his hand to his forehead, and then pressed it down over his eyes in the effort to realize what was to him still an impossibility. Morna! Proud, tender, fastidious, purely passionate in her one deep love for Ian. And this! This creature flying from her husband's home in dishonor, leaving dishonor behind. The two beings could not be reconciled.

He roused himself to take up the other letter. Perhaps some elucidation of the problem might here be found. But though it ran to wordy length, was filled with interjections of horror, astonishment, sympathy, it conveyed no fresh news. Without Ian's letter he might have refused it credence; but, now all that it could do, in its corroboration, was to confirm the fact. Ian was not mad.

Morna was the very last woman in the whole world that I should have dreamt of as capable of this. I should not have believed it if anyone had told me. I cannot say what I feel, how I feel for you all! Please break it to poor James. I cannot wire such awful tidings. I think someone ought to come to Ian. We hear very strange stories here.

Then over the page the words seemed to leap out at the reader:

> Old Kirsty thought he was going out of his mind. It seems he hadn't the least suspicion. Poor, poor fellow! Robert went over at once, but Ian wouldn't see him, and poor Robert came back in great distress. He was so fond of Morna! Dearest Millicent, I assure you it has made me quite ill. James must come—and at once.

The reader's hand dropped by his side, unconsciously crushing the letter. He could see the worthy Inglis couple in his mind's eye—kindly, everyday people, living their orderly lives within the groove of convention as far as material things were concerned; and in the spiritual—pious, disciplined, unimaginative Catholics of the old school, averse to any display of emotion, any exaggeration; yet fundamentally good. It was in their little private chapel that he had had the first gleam of the wonder, the mysticism hidden in their faith, which had drawn him, almost violently, out of the natural course of his life. He slowly folded the letters and replaced them in his breast pocket, and sat down at his writing table to reflect upon his course of action. Apart even from the urgency of arrangements for the coming journey, there were a thousand pressing claims upon his time and energies; yet he knew that if he did not give himself this half-hour's leisure for ordered thought, he would rue it in the end of the day as much as any leader rushing to the attack without careful plan.

The room in which he sat bore evidence to the character of the man who dwelt therein. Its whitewashed walls, its

oilcloth covered floor, its three straw-bottomed chairs and two deal tables spoke of that poverty to which he had voluntarily dedicated himself; a poverty not imposed by any vow, but forced upon him as it were by the presence of the hopeless, hideous poverty around him.

Over his mantel-shelf an exquisite facsimile of the Brera head of Christ, looked down on the sordid place, in divinely serene sadness. It was his brother's wife who had sent it to him, from Venice—years ago, in the first days of his priesthood.

On the other side of the window with its coarse, grimy lace curtain, hung a water-color sketch of Stronaven, the nest of his race, up in the farthermost north, the home of his childhood—a typical Highland castle, all in height, amid the birch, the ash, the oak and the larch. It was an impressionist sketch and the wooded slopes were but indicated in shadow, the bold swing of the keep rising almost like a threat against a sky that held storm in its yellow glare. But James MacIvor, it is scarce exaggeration to say, knew every clump of trees that clothed the lands of his sires. He knew where in springtime the birch shimmered, delicately green in ethereal silver-stemmed company; and how they flamed, living fire, in the autumn. He knew where the larch hung its tassels, incense-fragrant; where the oak spread the strength of its twisted boughs; where the rowan clustered. Many an evening in the recent weltering August days, with the evil reek of the street in his nostrils and the ceaseless unlovely turmoil of its sordid existence in his ears, he would dream himself back, a boy, in some bracken-filled hollow of the glen, the warm air

fanning his face, a pure joy to inhale, for the bog-myrtle was on its wing, and the pine sap.

An antique carved ivory crucifix, mounted on silver-clamped ebony over a base of massive silver curiously wrought and set with gems, stood on the plain deal table in odd contrast with its mean accessories; the double sheet of blotting paper, the penny ink-bottle in a saucer, the unlighted paraffin lamp and its woolly mat. The crucifix was the gift of the Master of Stronaven, and had been chosen with the mingling of subtle eclecticism and sumptuousness characteristic of the man. It was very dear to its possessor, coming from that brother in whom all his earthly affections were centered. It presided, dim, splendid, terrible, over his squalid room, holding day by day an ever deeper meaning for him. Any six-penny mission crucifix would, of course, have been as sacred and sweet a symbol; but this relic of an age of faith typified in these surroundings all that his vocation meant to him. In the midst of poverty, through the relentless companionship of ugliness and privation, the gleam of secret jewels; memories of all that art has conceived most beautiful, all that wealth has lavished on cathedral, minster, shrine and sanctuary; the whole beauty of the world, enfolding and culminating in the pale figure with the outstretched arms. His crucifix epitomized to the lonely mission priest the ancient faith and his own soul's life in it.

Now with his elbow on the table, his chin propped on the lean hand, and his eyes unconsciously fixed on that piteous and pitiful image, he was passing in review the claims of the coming day—those which he could in conscience avoid, and those which pressed more urgently even

... unconscious from the docks with
his neck; drifted down to die in this hur
n, from some far-away lovely glen on the
some spot so lost and aloof that the c
had never even reached him! After th
MacIvor told himself it was his duty to
uth about that fight, which, according t
ng information, had taken place last nigh
ise Row and Jubilee Rents, where his Irish
ies. And Brodie must be visited, and a
for the night class. . . . And old Andy Ma
Mac sighed—Andy had broken out ag
weeks since he had last taken the pledge!
was sick at heart as he finished jotting
e at last.
had been a mission priest now some six year
ook back upon his first ardent hopefuln
akin to wonder. To seek and rescue the lo
it, bruised and torn, upon loving shoul
old; that is the joy of the apostolic life.
t agony is the seeming futility of the rea

flickered. "I don't pity you if you've got such a good breakfast every day!" That was what Milly had said. The loaf was "skinned," the sardine tin empty. He tilted the marmalade jar and smiled again. But there was a little butter left. St. Michael's is not famous for dairy produce —enough of it for a slice or two of that neglected crumb, and the tea, if cold, would be strong.

After his tale of bewildering activities, with the never unremitting drag and weight of his heart, James MacIvor knew that it would be wiser during the night journey to try and sleep in preparation for that morrow which loomed before him with ever deepening dread and significance. But he found any relaxation of thought impossible.

There were but a couple other occupants in the third-class carriage and they were fortunately more disposed to slumber than to conversation. The traveler found himself as completely alone with his thoughts as in his poor room that morning; more alone indeed, for all the claims of the day's work which had clamored at him had been answered. And the long night stretched before him, in which to hearken to these voices from the past and these unanswerable questionings for the future now besetting his soul. Above all, it was ever the cry of wonder that rose the loudest to sink in a wail of incommensurable sadness. Morna—Morna! That it should be Morna! . . . Oh, star of the morning, how art thou fallen!

Morna! Her very name had always breathed to him poetry and romance. It spoke of the mountain glen; of the free winds that blew there, scented with the heather; of translucent tarns, deep, deep and pure to their depths, open to the skies, mirroring no shadows but the grand

darknesses of the clouds, the noble march of the stars, the glories of sunset or sunrise. . . . Morna! It was the very soul of his own dear hills that was incarnate in that name, and in her! Remote, yet gracious; wild, yet tender. Untamed, fearless, innocent. Oh, above all, innocent! James MacIvor groaned and covered the sound, (as one of his fellow-travelers glinted surprise at him through a sleepy eye) by a dry little cough.

As the rushing train throbbed forward into the night, vivid pictures of the past painted themselves before him; and always Morna was the central figure. She was of their own blood. She was associated with every recollection almost as far back as he could remember. Coming in age between Ian and himself, she had been nursery tyrant first, and then playmate, confidante; leader of mischief and warm confederate; the sharer in pranks and punishments; sharer in joys and sorrows, wraths and follies, all their happy holidays at Stronaven—long golden summer days—keen, brief, snow-bound winter ones.

The fleeting pictures succeeded each other. . . . Morna, at four years, sitting on the floor of that turret nursery and drumming on the boards with little red-shod heels; her starched white embroidery frock outspread stiffly, the beads of her coral necklace hopping about her as, in sheer defiance of punishment, she had broken the string. Morna, a small, flying figure, skipping up the moor side, a cloud of dark hair floating about her, her violet eyes afire with the joy of life, singing like a June lark. He could almost hear—through the thundering rhythm of rail-speed rising and falling with such perfect monotony that it left the mind unhampered—the sweet childish pipe in its accents of

innocent ecstasy . . . Morna, sobbing in a black frock, lamenting the only mother she had ever known—his own mother—on the miserable day of mourning at Stronaven. . . . Morna, older now, sitting on the crag, her hands clasped round her knees, staring out across the glen into the distant horizon with a gaze that seemed to see even beyond again—and Ian, lying at her feet, his chin on his hand, staring up at her. . . . That scene, all in the rosy sunset, was one that had been deeply stamped on the younger brother's mind, for it was there for the first time that a double knowledge bit into his heart; he loved Morna, and she would never be for him! He could not be jealous of his brother. He had always acknowledged Ian's right to be first and to have the best. But, until the hour came when a higher and more wonderful passion took possession of his soul—overwhelming, absorbing—he had suffered dumbly all the young lover can suffer as the love story of his rival unfolds itself in success before his eyes. As boys, neither he nor Ian, could ever have imagined their lives without Morna. The time came when manhood asserted its exclusive demand.

Once again amazement began to submerge every other sensation in the mind of the dreamy traveler. Had there ever been such a love story as that of Ian and Morna, to end in this inexplicable sordidness! It had been like some wonderful lily-flower born unconsciously in the depths of their being, grown with their growth, thriving unharmed through unexpected storms and early blighting frosts, to expand at last in perfect beauty; fragrant, stainless, dazzling! So he had always thought, he who had cherished his own devotion so many years in secret; with whom it

had been Morna or nobody—until the moment came when it had been God alone.

Despite enforced partings and his already crazy father's determined opposition, Ian had been faithful to Morna, as Morna to Ian. And, since then, their fourteen years of married life had always seemed to James to embody a more complete natural happiness than he had ever conceived possible. Save for the agonized separation, when the Master of Stronaven had led the corps that he had raised on his own estates to the defense of his country's honor in South Africa, there had not appeared a cloud upon their union. True, they were childless, and impoverished; but the deep inner content remained untouched. Indeed, the complete harmony of their joint existence seemed deepened and strengthened by trouble faced together, and by a sorrow which each sought to lighten for the other, in which each deemed the other harder hit. Often, as Father MacIvor in the first fervor of his change of faith and the awful exaltations and revelations of the priesthood, had lamented the lack of any real form of religion in those two, he had consoled himself with the thought that the marriage of such serenity and devotion was a sacrament in itself. "No, Morna," he had once said to her, "your *Welt Religion* says nothing at all to me, my dear. But the life you two lead here—yes, I think that is pleasing to God!"

He shivered and stretched his cramped limbs. The third-class carriage was cold and draughty enough, this September night. But he was unconscious of physical discomfort, amid the unrelieved misery of his mental outlook. If it had been to Morna's or to Ian's deathbed he was hastening, he could have found, he told himself, in bowing to the

divine dispensation, a balm of resignation in sorrow. But here was no act of God. Whichever way he looked, there was the taint of evil. God, here, was offended no less than man. And the defilement which had fallen on the soul of that fair sacramental union had no less smirched it in what might be termed its material body, its world aspect. Much that was human had had necessarily to die in the priest, before the new life could have its full sway; but pride of race is all but impossible to kill. It leaped up in him now, fierce, resentful. It was his name that had been dishonored; the nest of his stock that had been defiled—his own home, his own blood!

Without conscious effort his lips began to move in silent prayer—the habit of the soul assailed seeking by instinct its weapon of defense—and, turning again in his seat, he rubbed the dim pane and stared out into the night. As he did so, the hot uprising of wrath was succeeded by a rush of feeling, poignant and tender. They were crossing the border! He had that lift of the heart with which the exile greets his own. What true Highlander feels anything but exiled in the southern lands? The September moon in her third quarter, forging through filmy wracks that seemed to reflect rather than conceal her radiance, shed light enough on the shifting panorama to reveal all its wildness, even to the eye of a stranger. But James MacIvor was lovingly familiar with this long low contour of hill, those winding creeks, spreading out here and there into shallow lakelets where the moon dipped. On the other side of the speeding carriage he knew how the curved ripple crept and spread with low lazy movement this still night. In the chill atmosphere he could scent the tang of the salt and the

weed. Solway—and far away yonder the hills of Galloway.

"Land of the mountain and the flood,
Land of my sires . . ."

He murmured the lines to himself, as they floated into his mind from some lost hour of boyhood.

The sense of shame and resentment had passed as the bleak gorges of Ewan Water closed in about the road. He sank back and shut his eyes, not to court sleep, but further thought. The night had waned. Half his journey was accomplished, he had arrived at no conclusion, no point of rest from which he could order his plans. The mystery was as unsolved, the future as chaotic, as troubled as ever. But a single suggestion stood out like a pointed shaft of rock from the turmoil of the dark waters of his thoughts. The child with defiant baby face, breaking its string of corals; the little maid singing in ecstasy on the hillside; the passionate girl, terrifying her companions in the midst of their own mourning by the violence of her grief. It was a generous sensitive nature, extreme in every emotion; it was there—he could see it now—that the danger at all times lay.

His lined ascetic young face quivered, as the next question sprang; was it possible after all? This artist they spoke of had perhaps some fatal power of romance and ardor about him. . . . But the idea had no sooner presented itself than the whole soul of the thinker rebelled. Playmate, comrade, friend, betrothed, wife, he had seen her pass through each successive stage; and, in every phase,

it was her loyalty, her radiant stainlessness of soul that had shone out most vividly. No! His mind swung back to the first intuition; what has Ian done? And then, at last he found firmer ground beneath his feet. He was no longer tossed to and fro between inarticulate suggestions; his work lay with his brother; Ian must be made to give up his fatal resolve. He must at least be induced to wait. Divorce!—divorce Morna? The very words sounded mad. Humanly speaking, he had better leap from the topmost battlement of Stronaven where as boys they had so often looked down in awed speculation upon the swaying tree-tops below them, than kill that better life of his, that best part of himself! Morna had been—so James thought—something like Ian's own soul to him. Ian without her, what would he be? Horror—a man without a soul!

The traveler must have dozed at last, upon the relief of finding some kind of purpose before him, for he was startled by a sudden roar and throb about him. It took him a second or two to realize that they were passing through a tunnel long stretched out, in which all the sounds of their progress, beat of piston and roar of wheel, were caught and held and sent back upon them with multiplied clamor. He drew his watch and peered by the flickering light. Even as he did so, his fellow-travelers stirred and stretched; rose and shook themselves and groped for bags. Edinburgh. Edinburgh already!

The reverberation fell away and lights flashed into their compartment; the train drew up, grinding in the familiar station. As his companions went out, and the raw draught blew in, he drew his rug closer about him. One of them, dragging his bag along cast a look of good-

natured pity at the poor fellow who was doomed to journey forward through these worst hours of chill and lassitude, instead of catching up lost comforts under a kindly roof. Then the door slammed. Father MacIvor sighed with satisfaction to find himself alone, and dropped the window which Christian charity had forbade him to open upon the sleepers' huddled forms.

Edinburgh. There, in that old gray town, lay—he prayed it might be in peaceful slumber—that white head, which, day in, day out, wove such restless, frantic fancies; the head of his old, mad father.

The fine mansion which the son of the MacIvors who had lost his life at Preston Pans had erected in pomp and prosperity, when the New Town arose—and the family fortunes had begun to flourish once more with acquiescence to the powers that were, and the half of a rich alliance—was now the prison house for the head of the race. There, between the walls that had seen the birth of his own life and that of his sons, Lord Stronaven, surrounded by every comfort that the greatest mental specialist of the city could devise, ministered to by respectful attendants whom it would have been crude to describe as keepers, consumed the best part of the revenues of an already impoverished estate, in a feeble thread of existence that could hardly be called life. Unless the fatigue of a mind vainly pursuing in circles indefinite elusive purposes can be called suffering, the condition of the old Lord was mercifully painless. He was harmless as a child (so his chief "valet" testified) with the single exception that the sight of any of his children irritated him to frenzy.

As far back as James could remember, the father had

been the black shadow upon the Stronaven household; but it was only after their mother's death that the seeds of insanity—dormant since the hardships of the Indian Mutiny—had begun to develop beyond the moody eccentricities, the long fits of melancholy abstraction which had haunted their childhood.

None of the three MacIvors—Ian, Millicent and James—had been able to find, in the terror which their parent inspired, any warmth of love. It was only since the pitiable debasement of his intellect, since the angry threatening figure which had dominated his boyish days, had been replaced by the picture of the shuffling, witless old man, that even the priest's heart had been able to turn back in tenderness toward him whom it was not probable he would ever see again until death restored dignity to the soulless clay. As the train jerked out of the station again, gathering smoothness with speed, he leaned his head out of the window, to look up toward those glimmering clusters of light which wreathed the upper edge of the valley. Pray Heaven, he thought again, that wearing brain was quiet yonder! He had a horrible mental picture of the dimly-lit room, the attendant quelling, with unpitiful professional authority, the restless gesture of those lean arms that sent such fantastic shadows dancing between the curtains of the four-poster bed where lay babbling a wraith of manhood. At Delhi, so the record went, young Stronaven had been the most dashing, the highest hearted and most gallant of all that gallant legion of Highland soldiers.

James MacIvor pulled up the window again, and changed his seat. All that was of the irrevocable past. The father

could touch their lives no longer, till his death brought relief to all. It was the future that was of concern. He considered and rejected a dozen different ways of approaching his brother. Ian was not easy to approach upon the inner matters of conscience and conduct. And yet these were now vitally at stake. The bright, hot spirit of his brother had always seemed to him a dancing flame; you could not lay hold of it or encompass it. It would dazzle, mock and evade. And James himself, was, of all men, the least fitted (he pondered ruefully) for a task that required a courage as merciless as it was delicate. It was always agony to him to talk of the secrets of his own soul, or probe into those of others. All his life, with him, an eager spirit had relentlessly driven an awkward shrinking body. That he should have been driven into priesthood by a relentless mysterious force seemed an irony of fate to the outsider. He, himself, called it by another name. When, in obedience to the inner voice, he had set out to answer the call: "Take up thy cross and follow," he had sometimes thought that it was his own inarticulate personality that pressed heaviest on his shoulders. That was before the father's heart which must beat in the breast of every true priest had begun to understand the miseries of Christ's "little ones."

Now the acute consciousness of his own disabilities for the task of warning and succoring, warred with the knowledge of a soul in grievous danger, with the crying need of one who was his own brother in the flesh!

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the blank gray of dawn became shot with the faint translucent yellows that prelude a fair day, the traveler had changed to the Highland line and was traversing the most desolate and beautiful scenery of his own country. The valleys were still wrapped in mist, the mountain shoulders still emerged wraith-like through pallid gloom; one faint star hung, tremulous, in a sky washed of color, ineffably remote. Then, the giant shadow of Morven was struck by a dart of gold.

James crossed the carriage to gaze out upon the eastern side. With inconceivable rapidity the spear-rays shone and spread. You could almost see the movement of the rising disk, he thought, so promptly did it tip the receding horizon. In another minute or two the sun had floated clear, poised in his own radiance. Swiftly the priest's mind turned to the thought of that Altar he had bound himself to serve; where, hidden or displayed within the small white circle dwelt—to his belief—*He Who made the great lights.*

The scene that spread out before his eyes was one that, even drenched by rain or wracked by winter wind, would have appealed to every fiber of his being. But now, clothed in the exquisite mystery of early morning, the new virginity which every recurrent day imparts in secret to the world, bathed in the fair light of a cloudless sunrise, it wore a beauty that, after the long-drawn darkness and

mental misery of the night, seemed to him almost unearthly.

The hills in their coat of the dying heather, sprang purple-black against the purity of the horizon with an intensity of hue only seen in those regions. The dwarf birch trees rose like flames here and there along these velvet slopes. A brawling burn ran close to the line, still in shadow, yet clear in cairngorm tints over the polished stones. A veil of haze floated between the margin of the meadows and the swell of the mountain. Now a pine wood leaped up like a march of soldiers—there was deep night still between the tall stems. And, as suddenly as it had appeared, the woodline fell away, and a huge pool stretched, glass-still, and caught in its bosom the rounded glory of the sun and the black fall of hill.

A curious mingling of peace and sadness took possession of his soul. Why seek and plan, why fret and torment himself? Were not the issues of this in other hands than his? To pray for guidance and do his best as the moment inspired; no other course was open. No man could do more.

The well-remembered scenes ran by; each with its exceeding loveliness. The crucial moment was approaching with a rapidity that seemed terrific. Already here was his last change. He thought that the guard and porters at the branch station followed him with curious scrutiny, as if the news of the family disaster were already spread over the countryside.

With an uneasy stirring of humiliation he climbed into the rickety carriage on the single line, where, presently, the antique engine with an extraordinary amount of puffing

effort began to drag the two or three passenger compartments and a goodly number of coal wagons through the lone defile beyond which lay the Stronaven Estates.

Before alighting at Ballochrioch, his station, he pulled his soft hat over his eyes and raised the collar of his coat to conceal his identity, if possible, from prying eyes. But, as the old porter thrust his bag into the fly, he paused and stared in at the priest's muffled figure; and James knew that his precautions were vain.

"Is it you, Sandy?" he said, ineptly enough, diving into his pocket for one of his rare sixpences.

The man still stared a moment or two. His Highlander's eyes, pale and piercing under the rugged white eyebrows, were fixed unwaveringly:

"Aye. Is it you, Mister James?" he answered at length.

They understood each other, these two; and James MacIvor inwardly winced under the unspoken sympathy.

Old Sandy slammed the door and glanced up at the driver. Words of direction were unnecessary here. Not a man on the narrow platform but had recognized the visitor! Not one but could have foretold his coming! But, as the driver gathered up the reins, Sandy bethought himself and made a sign of further delay. He thrust his head in through the window:

"I'm hopin', Mr. James," he cleared his throat, "I'm hopin'—" Once more he paused to struggle with speech, then proceeded: "I'm hopin'," he said for the third time, "that you'll find the Master as weel as can be expeckit."

As the aged vehicle rattled away at the shambling trot of a raw-boned young horse, James MacIvor could not forbear a faint smile. Is there any situation so fraught

with tragedy but that, at some point or other, the comic element will not rise and grin? But, as they crawled up the steep hillsides and clattered down again, and crossed the single cobbled street of the village, where every woman and child seemed to be on the lookout to get a glimpse of his stricken face, the shaming aspect of the family misfortune presented itself afresh and with renewed force.

The scared face of the old woman who drew back the great wrought armoried gates, on one side, seemed as hard to bear as the bold and curious eyes of her granddaughter, on the other.

Then the great pines of the avenue closed in about him as the fly moved onwards at a brisker pace upon the well-metaled roadway. The approach to the castle was a mile and more in length. He was glad of the respite. To the pines, the lovely larch woods succeeded; and then the park began to spread, falling away on either side from the high ground on which the avenue ran, into beautiful hollows and gently swelling eminences crowned with groups of oak. The sunrise promise had been kept in glorious noonday. A great stillness lay over the land. The bracken glowed in orange and russet against lines of sheltering wood. A herd of deer flitted across the way, shy and noiseless like things of fancy, shadows of lovely life.

To him who was returning to his home under such hateful circumstances, all this beauty was cruel, unnatural. The fact that nothing should seem changed, came upon him with an unreasonable surprise. He had always felt his own being so bound up in these ancestral acres—MacIvor and Stronaven, the race and the land that had nur-

tured it, were so inextricably blended one with the other—that, if he had found all about him now blighted, drooping, darkened, it would, he thought, have been but fitting to the calamity that had befallen them.

They were approaching the bend of the road, round which the first glimpse of the castle would show itself. The horse had fallen into the peculiar crawl which protests against ascent. Once again a belt of giant firs rose darkly; the ground dropped away beyond them, very sharply, toward the lake which set the final seal of beauty upon the demesne.

Instinctively he turned to look for the gap which would reveal the shimmering waters, and the jewel-colors of that sunken garden which it had been Morna's pleasure to establish by its bank; vision of flowers which broke on the traveler with the freakish loveliness of a fairy tale.

And, as he looked, he started; then rubbed his eyes and stared again. It was as if an icy hand had gripped his already anguished heart. He had been expecting some sign of desolation, had almost desired it, and behold—here it was!

Some forty yards beneath them, where his glance, with the confidence of custom, had looked for the gemmed glories of the hidden garden, there stretched waste, devastation. If a herd of wild boar had trampled, and uprooted, and rent with furious tusks, this spot of beauty could scarce have been more ruthlessly brought to ruin.

The slender column in the center of the beds which had borne the quaint Verocchio statue brought from Italy, lay overthrown, hacked to pieces. Yonder mound of muddy blue—the delphiniums of which Morna had been

so proud—and, farther on, those jumbled reds and yellows, glimmering like the shards of some cathedral window—all that was left of the ordered loveliness that had been so fair a sight!

An indescribable misery, an apprehension akin to that which the shadow of the hawk casts over the singing bird, fell upon James' spirit. The image of his brother's anger rose before him; something that almost took a mighty shape, black and evil, withering as it came. The letter had been as a cry from the pit—fury and despair—it was the same impression now—fury—only intensified.

He had to gather his courage together before he dared cast a glance upon the other side. What further spectacle of frenzied demolition might he not have to witness! The apprehension was absurd, yet he drew a breath of relief: There, on the high ground, stood Stronaven Castle as he had ever seen it; its battlements and angle-turrets cutting the sky far above the tree-line, dominating now as through the ages; still wrapt, it seemed, in pride of impregnability; defiance to all enemies, promise of shelter to all friends. Another yard of two onwards and, in its shifted aspect, he would see the silhouetted head of the Stone Man, crouching still in grotesque intentness—watching with eyes which nine centuries had not worn out, the valley road, the road of the invader.

Yes, there he sat, ancient Ach Hay, the mythical founder of the race, whom he and Ian, long into boyhood, had half-credited with secret, mysterious life.

When the fly stopped before the low gate that divided the pleasure-grounds and terraces from the park, the traveler jumped out. He felt a characteristic repugnance

at the thought of a single unnecessary witness of his entrance into his brother's dishonored home. Hurriedly he paid the man; then, deaf to offers of service, seized his bag and, flinging the gate behind him, walked determinedly forward.

If the wanton murder of color and beauty in the sunken garden had hurt him, the untouched splendors of the borders round the terrace seemed, in some perverse way, to add to the bitterness in his soul. Chrysanthemum, dahlia, sunflower, snapdragon, scarlet geranium—they flaunted their glories against the frowning gray of the old stone walls, as if in mockery of the inner mourning. He paused, hesitating a moment, running his eye up the huge pile that fronted him. No sign of life, no sound! The narrow windows high above his head flung back the sun's rays from closed panes. . . . Morna would have had every casement open on such a day as this.

He made up his mind again quickly. He would not ring, he would not have himself announced. He would spare his brother and himself the humiliation of servants' observation. He would go in by the small side door which was generally open—the door into "my lady's garden," as it was still called, in memory of the indulgence granted to some ancestress of a stern bygone age. He would creep up the turret stairs to old Kirstie's room—she could fetch Ian to him there. And then—he swallowed a lump in his throat. It was lucky that he could have found his way blindfold. Just for the moment he could not see at all.

A sudden yearning overwhelmed him for the old childish days—the days when Ian and he had hugged each other.

How would he bear the meeting? Ian broken-hearted! Ian ashamed! Ian with the demon of unassuaged rancor in his soul!

But he was not destined to carry out his plan and remain unobserved. The old gardener and a boy were hard at work in the inclosure. Even as grating of the spade struck upon James' ear, he knew in his heart what was happening. In systematic fashion the herbary was to share the fate of the lake garden. The smell of the fresh-dug earth mingled with the pungencies of bruised lavenders and rosemaries, the wild fragrance of thyme, the heavy, homely savors of balm and southern wood: the sundial with its old French motto had already been removed from the center where the flagged paths converged; plants were piled there in a confused heap. The mist of tears dried in James MacIvor's eyes. This work of ordered outrage evoked a stirring of anger which the wild havoc had not called up.

As he stood in the shadow of the archway cut in the huge strength of the wall, he was aware that both the workers had seen him; and that, yet, sympathetically, they feigned ignorance. He walked slowly past the incense-breathing mound and turned toward the castle. But pride bade him pause beside the over-busy workers. The old man then straightened himself and pulled a forelock; the boy flung a frightened side glance, caught up the half-filled barrow and hastily trundled it down the path.

"Gude-day to ye, Mister James," said Simon the gardener, in a steady voice. His rugged face was set like a mask; he stared fixedly at the clerical waistcoat.

"Good-day, Simon," said the priest. The humor of

things was with him. Elaborate unconsciousness was old Simon's notion of tact. Well, it was not a bad one. "Doing away with the herb garden, I see," he said.

"Aye, Mr. James, the Master reckoned he'd as lief have a bowlin' green."

"Indeed."

The old servant's face suddenly worked. He put a grimy hand to his forehead; and James saw that it shook. Then the toil-worn hand that had stirred no other soil these fifty years than that of Stronaven pointed toward the heap:

"A' to be burned—the hale of it—and her Leddyship sae fond of them! Yer ain mither, Mr. James—her that set the dial yonder an' a'."

James moved hastily on. The scent of the uprooted plants pursued him like a cry. He dropped his bag in the narrow passage and ran up the steeply winding stairs, pulling fiercely at the rope from time to time. He must not give himself pause for further thought: the inner man was coward enough already.

"Lord's sakes!" cried old Kirstie. She sat for a moment, clutching the arms of her high wooden chair, before she could collect wits enough to get up and greet him with due respect. Once she had ruled over Stronaven's nurseries; she still ruled as housekeeper. A stiff curtsey, that was all Mr. James had ever had from her since he had turned papist. He bent and kissed her, as he always did. Even in this moment of affliction, she averted her withered face—not that he had ever minded or would mind now. This was the attitude of Kirstie's conscience, and he respected it as such. Her heart had never changed: he

knew that. It was a leal heart, as the word of his own land had it. He caught her cold, knobbly hand:

"Oh, Kirstie!"

"Mr. James . . . what brings you here? Is it news, mebbe, ye're bringing?"

"News! What news? Why, Kirstie, didn't you know I'd come, the moment I heard?"

"But the Maister's gone, Mr. James!"

"Gone!"

"Aye—the nicht, in his motor-cair." Then she wrenched her hands from his grip and wrung them. A long wail broke from her lips. "Wae's me—wae's me!"

She flung her apron over the gray head in its goffered white cap, and rocked herself as she stood. He had never seen the iron old woman thus give way before. When their gentle mother lay dead among them, it had been Kirstie's red eyes alone that betrayed her secret weeping. When their father had driven forth from his own door, in the company of an urbane doctor and two polite attendants, none could doubt, after a glance at the housekeeper's stern face, that she shared to the full the family sense of misery and horror; but she had spoken no word, and none had dared address her on the subject.

James stood now watching the muffled figure, as it rocked feebly to and fro, listening to the low keening. He was bewildered by the fresh shock. Anxiety leaped up close upon a brief craven impulse of relief. Ian gone! Where, in the Name of God? And, God of mercy, in what state! Then the priestly instinct superseded all other feelings. Here was a creature in dire grief; here he must try to soothe and help. He laid his clasp once more on

those shaking, chilly hands; drew them gently from their frenzied pressure; forced the old woman back toward her chair. When she had sat down, she cast the apron down.

"Me laddie—me braw laddie! I'd rather have seen him in his coffin!"

If he could but have said to her: it is the will of God! . . . But tongue-tied he stood: what word of comfort could he find for her and for himself? The blackness of sin was about them! Their stricken house was full of the hideousness of it. This old woman's covenanting soul, his own soul of young man and priest, revolted from it with a kindred sense of the monstrosity.

The tears of age are difficult to shed, painful to witness. He averted his eyes. The withered face had a piteous air of forlorn childishness, with quivering chin and down-drawn lips.

"Kirstie," he said, after a pause, "do you think you could get me something to eat? I've had nothing since a cup of coffee at Perth—and that was at dawn today."

He had not done mission work these six years without knowing something of the nature of a woman of that class. So long as the peasant can work, so long as the old servant can minister, life will always be bearable to them. The words had an instant effect.

"Oh, Mr. James, and it is nigh on two this minute!"

She brought him the tray herself; stood over him and made him eat; insisted on the glass of ale, much as in bygone days of whooping-cough and measles, she had insisted on the full measure of tonic. After that, the tension was broken.

ae micht be thinkin' he was after her, I
r opeenion. It's my opeenion, Mr. James, i
r, he would be."

The listener was silent; then:

"I think you're in the right of it, Kirst
wly. Her blank hopelessness filled his own
d hastened, with what speed he might, to pre
l of forgiveness, of reconciliation; but his
n in a greater hurry still to put himself
wer of this divine prerogative; to strike ba
d been wounded, and with the most annihila
hand.

Without a doubt the Master had gone to Edi
matter was already in the hands of the fam
'I will wire, through Mr. Clouston," he s
self. Then they fell to talking upon th
blem. Not much, for she was as silent a
a man; and there were aspects of the ti
ch both shrank with an equal aversion. T
ma was hardly mentioned.

When Kirstie, averting her gaze out throu

His voice was harsh and faltering. Horrible that he should have to ask such things, and of a servant! The old woman turned and looked straight at him, a faint color rising in her bleached cheek.

"Me, notice? Me, suspect? Oh, Mr. James!" she cried; then, drawing her finger slowly down her apron, added: "But it's come to me since, Mr. James, she'd no been hersel', no, not for a good bit back. Restless, and whiles moody, and wakeful, though the Master having been ill, ye ken, gar me think it only natural, then. But whiles, since—since—I've thocht back on it and wondered."

Wonder! Had they been the most talkative creatures in the world; had they discussed the shameful matter backward and forward between them and torn the scanty evidence to shreds, they would have had to come back in the end just to that: the wonder of it, the unfathomable, distracting wonder.

"A'll have something to show you," said Kirstie into the silence that ensued, "but I'd as lief bide, before bringing ye into the rooms, till the servants' tea-time. They're locked, the noo. It's no that onything can be kept secret, but it goes sair with me, Mr. James, to have them speiring and talking."

James remembered the immolated lake garden. He could very well guess what kind of work had taken place within the doors Kirstie kept locked, and whose rooms they had been.

"I'd like my old quarters, Kirstie," he said, "and I'll just go down to the hall now and write—There's someone I can send on a message, I suppose?"

"And why for no? Wha's a better right?"

"I'll spend the night here. That's the best." Once more he was planning aloud. "I might get an answer from the Master. I'd like to be with him, Kirstie, if he'll only have me."

"Aye." A wistful glance passed between them. "We maun do our best," summed up the housekeeper with a heavy sigh. Fruitless scheming; futile effort; both felt failure before them.

James MacIvor wrote his letter quickly:

DEAR MRS. INGLIS,

I have just arrived here, only to find my brother gone. May I say Mass in your chapel tomorrow? And will you tell bearer the most convenient hour?

The inditing of the telegram required reflection. He tore up two or three forms, impatient of inept wording. In the end it was the simplest message.

Let me come to you, wherever you are. Wire address.

He addressed it to the care of David Clouston, W. S. Then he rang the bell and gave his orders to the butler. The man lingered a moment as if inviting question, ready to offer respectful information. Before the priest's dry attitude of dismissal, he bowed and retired.

James glanced round. The place was full of memories, too poignant to be indulged in. It was full of Morna's presence, and yet, already, there was a subtle difference. Already there was a forlorn, untenanted look about every-

thing. Careful Kirstie had had every window closed, every vase emptied. Banks of chrysanthemums and palms still filled their old corners: but Simon had forgotten to water them—poor old body, working bewilderedly at annihilation, without!

The air was oppressive. He slowly retraced his steps and the empty vaulted place gave back desolate echo as each foot struck the stone. Kirstie met him on a landing. She held a bunch of keys in her hand:

"Maybe ye'll be able to tell me what I'd best do with the mischief, when ye've seen it yersel'."

James nodded. He went along the narrow vaulted passages and stopped before a door. No need to tell him which! His mother had lain dead in that room, and Ian's bride had crossed its threshold on her wedding night.

Old Kirstie had bushy, iron-gray eyebrows that nearly met across a hooked nose. Under their pent-house shade, her eyes shone at him now in the dusk. She turned the key, but her hand hesitated.

"A body would think there had been a wild beast let loose in there," she said huskily.

James remembered what he himself had thought at sight of the uprooted, trampled down garden by the lake —and nodded. It was indeed a scene of senseless and savage destruction that met his eyes. Curtains had been torn from their hooks, pictures from their panels: those hangings of purple brocade misted with silver, which Ian had been so proud of discovering some years ago at Venice, which he had vowed were the right setting for Morna's dark beauty—had been rent from between the four columns of the carved-oak bed and flung in a con-

fused heap on the floor by the same violent hand that had shivered the silver-framed mirror, the gold-flecked purple goblets of Venetian glass.

"See here, Mr. James," came Kirstie's whisper, "I found the old claymore that he did it with in the room beyond, and I hung it back in its place, for shame of the folk."

The priest had no word of comment or reply. He cast his desolate glance about him, and presently started. From the paneled chimney-piece, the ruins of the Sienese Madonna gaped at him like a raw wound. Only the tips of the long pale fingers of the crossed hands, the curve of the blue-draped shoulder, a three-corner remnant of gold-diapered background remained of that treasure he had been so glad to see in that place of honor.

Involuntarily he put his hand over his eyes, to shut out the desecration. Kirstie's gaze followed the gesture.

"And indeed, Mr. James," cried the indomitable old covenanter, "if yon papistical image is a' you find to grieve for, I'll have ye ken 'tis the finger of God that was——"

"Be quiet, Kirstie," said the priest wearily. He brushed by her and pushed open the door into the turret chamber which had been Morna's sitting-room. He was prepared now for what he should find—it was but a further chapter in the same mad story. Morna had always liked bare spaces about her, and simplicity: but a few rare treasures—all of them Ian's gifts—had been allowed place in here. There they lay, now—Tanagra statuette and Nuremberg reliquary, Dutch tulip bottle, Florentine carving, Spanish enamel, and, on top of all was an over-

turned copper urn with a broken sheaf of lilies. What a piteous story it was after all.

Anger had been gathering in the brother's heart; but now, compassion overwhelmed it. He leaned against the door-lintel, his forehead on the back of his hand. His heart cried out in desolation: "Oh, my God!" But it was a barren desolation; the name of God was not written on any of these pages of horror. The housekeeper caught unceremoniously at the lapel of his long black coat, as he passed her silently, bent on escape.

"And what maun I do wi' it all?"

"Oh, what does it matter—!" he began irritably. Then checking himself: "I beg your pardon, Kirstie, you are quite right. Get Simon—or any of the old ones, to clear it all away, sometime, quietly, early in the morning. And keep the doors locked—afterwards, too."

"Aye," said Kirstie, "there's ower mony tongues clacking a'ready. A pity for the grand stuffs, I might be saving a bit here and there."

But she spoke to empty space. James was already gone.

CHAPTER V

THE west tower of the castle was comparatively modern. Its highest room, that seemed to top the world, extended the whole width of the building, from turret to turret. The Lord Stronaven who had enlarged the ancient dwelling of his ancestors, had made it his library. A bachelor, a man of solitary habits and philosophic mind, he had amassed in that far Highland

retreat a curious collection of books, chiefly concerned with the religions of the world. In many languages, vellum and calf-bound, mellowed by time, they ran in thousands the length of two walls; and not one dated later than that year 1750, the year of the student's death.

He had fled abroad after the '15 and had returned when the storm had blown over, a traveled silent man with but one passion—that of the printed page. From Holland he had brought those priceless Elzevirs which, even as a lad, James would finger with a sense of their fascination; from Venice the Aldines; from Cologne and Frankfurt the black letter folios which once had stood in the monasteries of Hirscheim and Münster; from Paris the Estiennes, from Madrid the rare Narvaez and the carved crucifix that he had hung on the west wall, none knew why—which crucifix, to the scandal of successive generations, had been left hanging, no one quite knew why either.

But James had always loved the room. As a schoolboy he had begged and obtained leave to move from the floor consecrated to the children to the lonely little cell-like chamber which opened off the library. It was in the silent company of these well-forgotten volumes which had once been of such importance in the world, beneath the outstretched arms of that deep-toned crucifix, that the young man had spent many long night hours wrestling with the mysterious call back to the faith which none of his forbears had owned for so many generations. It was here that a voice, awful yet sweet, had summoned him to a special dedication. It was here that he now brought a mind more ill at ease, a heart more tormented than he had ever known before. He began to pace the echoing

boards—no one had ever thought the room under the roof worth carpeting—and read his breviary till the dusk fell.

The three windows that pierced the western turret flamed and faded; but he would not pause to look out, for even through the closed casement the sound of spade and pick at work in the herb garden vexed his ear. . . .

"Her Leddyship was aye sae fond of it!"

Some intimate association connected with his wife must have turned Ian's frenzy toward this peaceful close; but the spirit of their mother was what haunted it as old Simon had felt—that sweet memory should have stayed the angry hand.

Two or three times, however, he paused in the opposite turret and gazed out. It was a wonderful stretch of country that he looked upon from this great height. He could see the lake, imbosomed between the wooded slopes; it flamed to the sunset. Flaming, too, were its banks, where the azalea foliage flaunted autumn tints. The ranks of pines marched toward the skyline on the right. On the left the park lands dipped and rose again, undulating grandly. And the bracken ran golden. Rowan and maple, bird cherry, birch and larch, each added its note of marvel to a scene already so rich and fair. And far away the hills were drawn clear: amethystine, luminous.

Many a time had he looked from that window, thanking God for the beauty of his brother's heritage and taking pride in it even as he prayed. Now wrath seized him. What a hateful business—above all what a stupid business! What folly of perversity! Oh, Morna! To have exchanged the queenship of a realm so noble for the mean by-street, the hideous impasse of illicit love! Alas, the

old exchange, the old foolish barter! The birthright for a mess of pottage, innocence for sin, the serenity of inward peace for a tortured conscience . . . !

He brought himself back with an effort to his book:

. . . Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit. In loco pascuæ, ibi me collocavit.

Super aguam refectionis educavit me . . .

he murmured, as once again he paced the length of the great room, the sunset rose gilding the page. He finished the psalm standing in the glow, but without lifting his glance. Then, even more slowly retraced his steps.

A change had already fallen on the world as he reached the eastern outlook once more. The lake was turning a glassy gray; the evening breeze was sweeping across the trees, and, as it went, seemed to be brushing the colors away. A bank of cloud was gathering southward: he knew the sign. It would rain before morning.

Presently there came shuffling sounds up the winding stairs; an intermittent tread, heavy and uncertain, accompanied now and then by a sigh that was almost a groan. Poor old Kirstie! It was a hard pull for her, he thought, and went swiftly to the door. She was on the landing, a lamp in one hand, a bundle of linen over her arm.

"Oh," he cried remorsefully, "you should not have come up all this way! Surely, among all the servants in the place——"

"Hoots!" she interrupted him, scornful if breathless. "I'll hae nane speirin on us! I'm fain to have another

word with ye, Mr. James. There's something—aye, ye may take the lamp. 'Tis best to be within closed doors. Aye, and I'm no sorry," she went on, as James drew the door behind her, in obedience to her hint. "I'm no sorry you've fixed yourself up here, Mr. James. Set the lamp on the table, there's a good lad. I'll e'en drop the bit linen on your bed within and set a match to the fire here. The nichts are cold."

It was not Kirstie's way to be garrulous. The priest guessed that she was covering some uncertainty of mind with this discourse. He took the matches from her hand, as painfully she attempted to kneel by the hearth. In a moment the dry twigs were crackling. The old woman stood, one hand on the table, her deep eyes fixed upon the rising flame.

"Aye," she muttered, "there's never a damp stick on any of my hearths. A few bit coal and the rest peat. The mistress—" she turned the glance in which the fire of a strong soul still pierced the veils of age—"the mistress, she set a deal of store by the peat. 'The reek of the peat,' she said, 'is the breath of the auld days.'" Kirstie's face worked. She bent forward. "Mr. James," she whispered, "I've something to show you."

She shuffled from him into the adjoining room, and a moment later reappeared, holding at arm's length in both trembling hands a large square canvas. She propped it against one of the high backed chairs near the table, then lifted the shade from the lamp. James looked, made a movement as if to cover his eyes, then dropped his hand and looked again. The gesture was as eloquent as a groan.

"Aye—" said the old woman, "was na she bonny?" The phrase in its simplicity, the unconscious finality of the past tense, rang like a dirge in his ears—was na she bonny!

He sat down, still looking. Kirstie went on. It seemed to him, who had never known her otherwise than taciturn, that the weak garrulity of age had come upon her swiftly these past days.

"When the master took the sair trial in sic unchristian fashion, and went about the place, Mr. James, like a roaring lion seeking what he might devour—God forgive me that I should liken him to the Enemy—though it was the spirit of a' evil that went into him in his trouble. It was that, as you see for yourself. Ah, it was no decent, it was no the wark of one so gently bred, it was no Christian! And to no ears but your ain would I breathe it. I was ashamed of my master—my ain master that I love sae dear!"

She paused, though her withered lips still moved, as if she were whispering the sad tale to herself. He heard her in silence. What she said struck home: he had felt it to the marrow of his bones. It had not been decent; it had not been gentlemanlike; it had not been Christian. He, too, knew shame for the brother who could not take his humiliation with pride, his sorrow with manliness.

The housekeeper drew a step nearer, speaking almost in his ear:

"I came upon him before the hearth in the hall, Mr. James, where the logs are aye kept burning, as ye ken. And he was tearing and flinging into the fire a' her photographs, a' her bonny pictures—them that had been taken

when she was but a bit bairn and them that stood on his writing table—and the face of him—Och, Mr. James." She broke off, to resume after a pause more expressive than any words: "Then I minded me of yon picture on the easel in the north turret—that's where the foreign gentleman had been painting her—and it came upon me what he wad do if it met his eye. I felt I could na bear it. I crept up the stair and I hid it, Mr. James, hid it under the bed within there. Aye," touching the picture, "that's what he did of her. That's what wrought the mischief! It's no dry yet, as ye see for yersel'."

The hand whose work was still wet upon the canvas was that of a great artist. The priest instantly recognized the fact. The method was modern enough; the color laid with a large movement; but the inspiration was as old as art itself. Here there was no doubting it, love had inspired and genius obeyed. It was Morna's very self, the soul of her, that looked from the canvas. The face and throat only had been elaborated; the line of the head with its crown of night-dark hair, the sweep of the shoulders were merely indicated. It was Morna as James had known her, as he had loved her—loved her with an affection brotherly yet poetic, wholly spiritual yet deeply romantic, loved her as the star of womanhood.

The pride of the poised head; the half-open eager lips, the gaze of the eyes, wonderful purple between the black lashes, seemed to reproach him: "Look at me, and dare to doubt me!" the face called to him. And his soul rose responsive with the old cry: It is impossible!

And then, as still he looked upon that face, there grew upon it an air of sorrow and trouble he had never known

there. Straight as the eyes opened on him, they were haunted. To his fancy they began to assume the expression of one fixing determinedly something of indescribable, inevitable tragedy.

He brooded long upon the enigma, his chin on his hand; and the old woman's gaze was on his face, watching its deepening gloom with an almost mystic comprehension. At last she spoke again:

"Ten times, they tell me, the gentleman painted out his work, for never was he satisfied with the likeness. . . . But that was, mebbe, his wiles."

James glanced at her sharply and raised his hand. He could scarcely bear to hear these sordid suspicions—with that face before him.

"Well, it's as it may be," she sighed. "This was the last. And now, Mr. James, what maun I do with it?"

"Leave it there," he said, rising. "I'll put it away myself, before I go. You did very well, Kirstie—Oh, no," he went on, half to himself. "Horrible!"

If that picture had fallen under Ian's mad fury! He thought of the sword across the heap in the Queen's room and shuddered. To have met the living presentment in his agony and madness, and to have murdered it! How could Ian's poor soul ever have risen up again!

James locked the library door behind him when he went down for his perfunctory meal. And before going to bed, in the little cell-like chamber, he sat again in long contemplation of the canvas. Yes, tragedy was there already. But of the consciousness of sin, of the clouding of shame,

there was no trace. Desperation perhaps in the fixity of the eyes, but never a hint of brazenness. Oh, no, this never was the face of a sinner! Here was not even the fool of love. . . . He could find no image, no expression in which to clothe the thought evoked in his mind. Nothing in all his experience of man and priest could meet it. And yet he knew that, vaguely stirring in his consciousness, there were memories, images akin to it, dim, somber, terrible; nameless yet haunting; memories as it were, of beings known in another existence. Creatures out of the far, far past, vital still with the grandeur and the horror that had evolved them. . . . He shook himself from the profitless contemplation. The rescued sketch could neither be exposed, nor destroyed. It must be hidden, must be hidden away—even as now Morna herself—from all the honest world. He sought for a safe place, and finally cleared a deep cupboard full of torn books and manuscripts, where he propped the canvas carefully face inwards, and locked the door upon it. The books and papers he piled in a corner, keeping back a volume, the Greek lettering of which had caught his attention.

The scholar in him, who had once roamed with such delight in far classic fields, stirred into life.

Eschylus!

As he carried the ancient volume to the light and opened the stained pages and inhaled the singular aroma that rose from them, the locked corner of his mind suddenly fell open, and he knew what it was he had been seeking. The eyes of Morna which had looked out from the canvas were those of the victim confronting a doom meted out by some awful, irrevocable power! So might *Phedra* have looked,

cursed with an unsought passion; so might *Jocasta*, innocent instrument of hideous crime!

He shuddered once more; and sitting down sought at hazard to distract his mind by the never-easy task of deciphering the rugged line. But it was as if no drop of the bitter cup was to be spared him tonight. Even from this splendid archaic chalice he must drink of the poison.

"*And they that could speak for the castle made long moan. Ah! Ah! for the house and its lord! Ah! for the marriage, for the memories of love!* . . ."

The words seemed to leap at him. Nay, it seemed as if they were cried into his ears.

He closed the book, and dropped his head in his hands.

CHAPTER VI

THE menace of the cloud above the range was justified the next morning, by the fine drifting rain that swept over the country, and the gusty breath of the southwest wind. It was seven o'clock. The priest mounted into the high dogcart beside the groom who was to drive him to Craigstoun. James had known the lad from boyhood and responded kindly to the touch of the hat and muttered greeting.

Between the shafts was a young horse; they went at a great pace down the avenue. The driver apparently was at first completely taken up by its management; but, as they turned out into the high road, he glanced tentatively two or three times at his master's brother. And

then, as if unable to keep back the feelings which pressed against the barriers of silence, he broke forth, abruptly.

"He had her shot, Mr. James—the mistress' mare!"

The priest started, turned his gaze toward the honest freckled face, and saw the horror in the eyes. He himself had been striving to bring his soul in peace to the great act of worship he had before him that morning. But the words shocked him out of the hard-won collectedness. He strove to frame a phrase in reply, but vainly. What, indeed, could he answer?

"She was fine and she kenned me weel."

The boy's hands gripped the wet reins and the horse leaped forward as if he had been struck. The high vehicle rocked and swayed. The rain came in long shudders across the land, obliterating the distance. It penetrated between collar and cap, between glove and sleeve. The dankness of it fell about the spirits like a winding sheet. James' soul had been stabbed to agony last night; now it was a dull misery that settled down on him as insidious and enveloping as the rain that held the world. It was not till the familiar aspect of the chapel at Craigstoun woke a thousand peaceful and happy memories, that the power to feel returned again.

Little Mrs. Inglis, with the expression she considered necessary to the occasion, somewhat painfully worn upon a countenance, by nature irrepressibly cheerful, had met him at the hall door, ready with veil and prayer book to conduct him to the chapel. He was glad in a numb way, that no one should be likely to enter into conversation with him till Mass was over. He shrank with sick distaste from discussing, even with kind friends, the hateful, irre-

trievable situation. Strength, he trusted, would be given him when the time came; and, as he crossed the threshold of the small chapel, he knew that he needed it. The place was a haunt of past joy, comfort and success. It had never been the scene of his spiritual struggles, but rather a sanctuary, first of light, then of peace. After his ordination in Rome, he had brought here his story of gratitude. Here, morning after morning, during brief but always satisfying holidays, he had driven over from the old home to say daily Mass. What fragrance of fresh summer air, what pictures of blue sky, rich foliage of beloved moorlands, had he not carried with him into the dim inclosure; what scent of autumn woods, to mingle with the indescribable breath of the chapel!

And that one Christmas, three years ago, which had been snatched against all expectation between two different spheres of work . . . they had both come with him, his dear ones, to the midnight Mass—in their large-minded, the brother feared too large-minded, way. What a night of frosts and stars it had been. A night of exquisite purity, of wonderful stillness that held the very cold at bay. All heaven and its angels had seemed to him to be gathered into the humble sanctuary!

Perhaps James MacIvor had never said a Mass in which the faculties of both body and soul had been so keen, as on this morning.

He was acutely sensible of the rustle of the heavy brocaded vestments, the faint crackle of the fine starched linen; of Mr. Inglis' heavy breathing behind him, as he knelt to serve, of the whisper of prayer-book leaves, the indefinable stirrings and sighings of the small devout

congregation; of the scent, clean and tart, of the chrysanthemums on the altar, mingled with the aroma of the wine as he poured it in the chalice. The diaphanous whiteness of the Host seemed to his eyes to give out an effulgence of its own against the yellow flame of the candles! But, as the awful act of sacrifice went on, as he plunged his soul deeper and deeper into its mystery, there came upon him a realization at once and an intimate sweetness, such as had never been granted before: *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi . . . miserere nobis!*

It was as he uttered this prayer that the gleam fell upon his troubled heart. He who had offered Himself, who was being offered on myriad altars, had taken on Himself, too, the sins that lay hideous on his own home; out of all that treachery, betrayal, malice unspeakable had wrought upon him, we dared call on the Lamb for peace!

The glory passed from his countenance like a ray of shifting sunshine. The shadows closed about him again, but with a difference; he knew that there was light in the darkness. The active despair of last night, the frozen misery of the morning had taken flight.

"Dear James," said Mrs. Inglis, "you must want a cup of tea, this dreadful morning!"

She peered inside the huge melon-shaped teapot and stirred the contents with a hospitable spoon. Cheerfulness was so much a part of this excellent woman that a gurgle of laughter constantly accompanied her speech. Today, though habit was too strong to be suppressed, she contrived to impart quite a solemn tone to these gurgles,

assisted by a persistent drawing down of the corners of her lips from their wonted hilarious angle.

She was of short stature, comfortably plump, with a bright bird-like eye and a pretty bird-like profile. Like most people who talk incessantly she contrived to say a great deal that had better have been left unsaid.

It was no wonder that James dreaded the ordeal that lay before him; but he knew that his host at least would spare his feelings.

Taciturnity was this gentleman's characteristic as garrulousness that of his spouse. A stiff, shy, awkward man, real benevolence lay under his unprepossessing exterior, as indeed James knew by many a kindly experience from childhood upwards.

The priest could not repress a faint smile of amusement at Mrs. Inglis' tactics. It was as if he had read into the good-natured creature's thoughts: "Poor fellow! We won't talk of anything unpleasant till he's had his good breakfast."

"An egg, James, dear? Did you notice my new St. Anthony? Oh, dear, I am disappointed. I was sure you would have seen him at once. Such a beauty! I put the old one in the servants' room. They like it. St. Anthony is always so kind, isn't he? And do you know, James, we have lost Biddy—poor old Biddy, our one Irishwoman. I do like to have the Irish to pray, don't you? They have such a wonderful faith. Oh, surely you're not going to pass Mrs. McCormick's scones? I should be very unhappy, if you did not have a scone, if only for the memory of old days!"

The chuckle was now caught back into melancholy.

She shook a sleek dark head with a sigh in honor of past light-heartedness. Presently the guest felt the attempt at distraction to be unendurable. Absently he took the proffered scone; and fixing his eyes steadily upon his old friend, broke into the very heart of the avoided subject with characteristic abruptness.

"I've read your letter to Milly, Mrs. Inglis."

The color rushed into her cheek. "Oh, yes. Dear Milly! Yes, James, Oh, how dreadful it is, isn't it? Dear me, yes, I couldn't have felt it more if she had been my own child."

There was a quiver of tears in her voice. James hoped earnestly she would not cry. He went on steadily:

"I wish you had telegraphed to me. I have missed Ian."

"We know, we know!" She nodded her head. "Yes, poor Ian! we heard he'd gone. I'm sorry, dear James, but it's a good thing that he should go. He was in a quite appalling state. Not that one can believe everything people say, but I'm afraid——"

"He—" James began, but the words stuck in his throat. He looked down, his angular face twitched. It was like a nightmare to him to think back on the work of his brother's senseless fury.

"Oh, we know, we know," repeated she, with unexpected comprehension. "But then—dear James, poor boy, you're terribly upset. There—we must make allowances. Oh, dear, don't we all want allowances made for us!" The gurgle escaped unawares, and hurriedly she went on: "Ian cannot be held responsible, I feel sure. Such a blow! And then, as I was going to say—" she bent her pretty,

brightly intent face confidentially across the table toward him, "it has seemed to me there might be some inherited weakness. Your poor father, you know? Has it struck you? The shock——"

Ian's brother started. No, it had never struck him. Accidental brain trouble is not hereditary. It was here Mr. Inglis lifted up his voice for the first time.

"Ian was always self-indulgent," he said.

James' glance shot toward him. The older man was fixing a corner of the tablecloth with a sidelong stare, after a curious habit of his. The remark sounded dry and unsympathetic—an effect produced by most of his speeches and accentuated by his rasping tone. James looked at him with a scarcely less startled expression than that which his hostess' suggestion had called forth. Was Ian self-indulgent? The question had never even suggested itself to him. It seemed almost as absurd to associate the idea with the Master of Stronaven as with any red deer of the glen—beautiful, untamed, irresponsible being that he was. Happiness, the pleasant ways of life, the love of those about him, had been his as by right of nature.

But the test had come and he had failed. Why had he failed? Here was one old friend hinting at madness, and the other proclaiming a fundamental weakness.

The first charge was not worth refuting. No one minded Mrs. Inglis' babble. The brother sought in his mind for instances to refute the second; and found himself seeking in vain. That Ian's instincts were generous and kindly, that he was incapable of a vulgar thought, of a coarse desire. merely limited the sphere of self-indulgence.

Image after image arose in his memory, but in not one of them did the Master appear in the light of self-sacrifice, repression or denial. The life which he and Morna had led together had been simple and harmless. Once again the brother's thoughts reverted to that simile of the wild deer in the forest; creatures of the open both, Morna and Ian, lovers of wildness and solitude together, of the winds and the spaces and the heights, exulting in the merely physical joy of life, breathing freshness, unconscious of evil. Yes, if there was one thing more than another that had always emanated from Morna, it was purity.

Morna! Not one of the three had yet had the courage to pronounce that name this evening, and now again it was James who forced himself to the task. In the pause of silence and crowding recollections, the iterated sense of surprise, of disbelief, rushed back upon him.

"I can't help feeling," he said with an effort, "that we ought not to credit such a thing about Morna until we know more."

"Oh," crowed Mrs. Inglis, "have I not said that a thousand times? Did I not say it to you, Robert, the first moment I heard it? I burst out laughing. 'Morna,' I said. 'Morna? It's impossible, ridiculous!' Why—" she began to shake with reminiscent mirth. "Why, they'll be saying I've run away from Robert next." Suddenly the lips drooped. "Unfortunately, dear James, the proofs are overwhelming. He, the man—Oh dear, I can hardly bring myself to name the creature—Signor Concini—came to fetch her away in a motor-car. They were seen together passing through the villages, here; at Aberdeen

also. People will talk to me, write to me about it, thinking I must know more."

Mr. Inglis twitched himself sideways. A low sound escaped his lips as if some internal machinery were preparing to grind out his words. Then they came:

"The less anybody talks about it the better," he paused, but the grinding went on. "Morna," he began, then repeated, "Morna, no doubt, could give an explanation if she ever chose."

James was for the third time conscious of startled feeling; the remark coincided curiously with the unfounded recurrent impression in his own mind: what has Ian done? The question escaped him, involuntarily, useless as he felt it to be. Mr. Inglis twisted his narrow shoulders, and made no protest as his wife answered for him in tones of reproachful surprise:

"Done? poor Ian! Done? He worshiped the very ground she trod on—didn't he, Robert? Why, there never was such a devoted couple!"

The last phrase was so incongruous to the actual situation that it struck even her. She fell silent, abashed. The three stared blankly before them. Enigma confronted them.

In spite of Mrs. Inglis' efforts, her guest did not make much of his breakfast; and he was in so manifest a hurry to be gone that she good-naturedly curtailed her own to facilitate his departure.

"I am expecting a telegram from Ian," he explained. "I have offered to meet him in Edinburgh, and would like to catch the midday train."

"Well, it's been a real treat having the extra Mass,"

said the little lady, as she pressed his hand on the doorstep. "And seeing you," she added politely.

Mr. Inglis grunted. The worthy couple stood, watching the cart spin away. Both its occupants had to bend their heads against the driving blast. As the wall of rhododendron hid them from sight, the wife tucked her hand comfortably under her husband's arm and led him back into the warm hall. She had a sense of satisfaction in getting rid of the visitor with his anxious, haggard face, and his sore heart. She thought of him and his trouble hurrying out into that dismal world and of the placid contented tenor of her own life.

"I think I must have another cup of tea," she cried cheerily. "Poor James, how miserable he seems! And how plain he is, poor boy. Certainly, Ian and Milly have all the good looks! And I suppose I ought not to say it of my convert—our convert, Robert! I often wonder what possessed him to be a secular priest. He's cut out for a monastery. A monk, that's what he ought to be!"

"It's a pity he didn't consult you, my dear," growled the listener, by no means unkindly.

Mrs. Inglis crowed. She never knew what Robert exactly meant by his odd little remarks, and her cheerful laugh covered useless speculation on the point.

As he expected, James found that the post had brought an overnight's telegram from his brother. But the message it contained was far from affording any satisfaction.

> Impossible meet you. Leaving Edinburgh tomorrow for abroad.

James pondered long over the barren lines. At last he made up his mind. He could still give himself today in Edinburgh, then take the morning train south and be at St. Michaels in time for the Saturday night confessions. He would interview the lawyer, and, at least, find out in what frame of mind, in what condition of health, the Master had seemed to be, should he indeed find him gone.

The post had likewise brought a scrawl from Lady Martindale, in which in an almost undecipherable hand, she begged for news.

> Do, do write! I'm so anxious! Much love.
> Your fond, fond Milly!

The wind was increasing to a gale, as James started on his return way after his fruitless journey. The third-class compartment was crowded. The reek of damp clothes, of strong tobacco thickened the air. Without, nothing visible but the gray of the driven rain. There was nothing to distract the traveler from his heavy thoughts. Slowly he summed up his impressions and faced a conclusion, the most melancholy possible for both heart and mind. The situation had assumed all the aspects of irrevocability. Even the Inglises had not seemed to entertain the possibility of reconciliation. He himself had not found it possible to breathe the hope of it, either to them or to Kirstie. He hardly knew if he still had any hope left upon a point so desperate.

Yet in the secret recesses of his soul, the memory of the gleam still lingered. Behind that livid lowering sky there

was the sun somewhere. Behind all the evil of the world there was always God.

At Edinburgh, he had a very brief interview with the man of law; and in this, two apprehensions which had begun to haunt him were at least removed. Ian had been perfectly collected; unusually so, it could be gathered, for one in such humiliating and distressing circumstances. And he had apparently not the smallest intention of setting in vengeful pursuit of his wife and her companion.

"Far from it, Mr. MacIvor," said the old man, "he has, and very wisely, no other idea than that of cutting the whole business from his life at once. I have promised that the proceedings shall be pushed through as speedily as possible. And as for his present purpose, the Master spoke of a tour in Spain. A very desirable proceeding. He is to keep me informed of his whereabouts. The first address," he consulted his notebook, "the first is Paris, Hotel du Rhin."

James, without speaking, wrote down the name of the hotel.

"The Master mentioned a week in Paris—Paris," went on the writer, fixing his little cold eyes upon his visitor's face with a shrewd glint in them, "is not a bad place for a gentleman who needs distraction."

James was sick at heart, as he went forth into the dripping street. Anxious as he had felt when he had entered the gloomy house, he was not sure now whether the fears he had been entertaining were not preferable to the certainty he was carrying with him; whether he would not rather have Ian frenzied and distraught than the

callous, relentless man, whose image the lawyer had in a few words evoked; whether, if Ian had dashed in mad pursuit of his wife, it would not have been a more human solution, one more likely to bring the mercy of God upon His creatures, than this cold resort to the unblessed machinery of the law!

"I will write to Ian tonight," he said to himself, "and urge him at least to delay. I will say to him that he will gain nothing by this haste; that it is surely more dignified, more seemly not to rush into proceedings; that perhaps, perhaps, things might come to light which would alter his point of view. Before the old name is dragged into the courts, I will beg him to give time a chance!"

He conned the phrases to himself. He would use only the human argument, urge only the worldly common-sense aspect—lest he should rouse the scoffing spirit which that tragic letter had already betrayed.

But even as he planned he knew that it was all in vain.

It was in vain. The answer from Paris was one that precluded any further attempt:

DEAR JAMES,

I know what I am doing and what I mean to do. Keep your advice for your penitents.

Yours,

IAN.

Two months later proceedings were carried through the Scotch courts at a single sitting. There was no defense.

CHAPTER VII

THE December afternoon was closing in, and Father MacIvor was beginning to consider the advisability of lighting his lamp, when the unwonted sound of a motor-car at his door made him pause and turn to the window. He had a quick prescience of the identity of his visitor and was not surprised to behold the fur-enveloped form of Lady Martindale in the act of emerging with characteristic precipitation. Her strident voice rang out into the little street:

"Isn't there a bell, or a knocker? What? Oh, never mind, Charles. You'd better thump."

It was with mingled feelings that the priest hurried out to admit his sister. He was deeply anxious to have news of Ian; for, beyond the bare announcement of the divorce which he had read in the yesterday's paper, he was in complete ignorance of all concerning him. On the other hand he knew that anything he could be told must fill him with pain; a pain which Millicent's outspokenness was little likely to soften.

His first glance, as he opened the narrow street door, showed him that her spirits were not suffering from the family misfortune. He thought he had never seen a more smiling picture of prosperity. Out of an immense wrap of chinchilla, her face at once delicately and vividly tinted, bloomed like some splendid June rose; her hair glinted under a hat more wonderfully befeathered than usual. Her blue eyes snapped.

"Oh, James, this is lucky! I was so afraid you might be doing something or other in this dreadful slum. Confessing or oiling somebody—What! Charles, just give me those papers from the car. Oh, James, I haven't a minute!"

She paused, quite filling up the little entrance. Her bright gaze twinkled and sparkled with her elementary jocularity. "I brought the car you see. I'm not to be caught out twice in Shadwell—What!"

"Come in," said her brother, briefly.

As he led her into his room, he was conscious, not without grim humor, of its unutterable sordidness in her eyes. And running his glance sarcastically up and down her splendid figure, he said:

"Little as you think of St. Michael's, you are still determined to astonish the natives I see."

"Don't be silly," she retorted with unimpaired good humor. "When I get back, I'm going to a dozen teas, of course. But you do like my coat? Theophilus gave it to me for my birthday. It's lucky someone remembered my birthday."

Then, conscious that she herself had given no sign of life to her brother, since he had answered her appeal for news, she went on hurriedly:

"Is that supposed to be a fire? I'm sure it's lucky I've got a bit of fur on. Do light up, James! Haven't you got gas, or something? I haven't a moment, but I can't bear talking in the dark."

Without a word he proceeded with the interrupted task and, the lamp lit, dropped the stained holland blind, mindful of footman and chauffeur without. She looked on

impatiently. Lady Martindale had a fine disdain for any class inferior to her own; she would not have minded discussing the matter before the two individuals without, so little did they count, in her judgment.

She dragged the American-cloth armchair toward the hearth and sat down, shaking out the bundle of papers on her lap.

"If you'd got a little paraffin to pour upon those coals," she explained parenthetically, "of course I'd sack a housemaid if she did, but it wouldn't matter here. St. Michael's way, I should think. No? Well, never mind, never mind. I'm not really cold, Jimsy. Well—it's all over, you know. Aren't you glad?"

He sat down opposite to her, without replying, his eyes fixed on the sheets of print spread on her lap. It was worse than useless to represent things from his point of view to Millicent. And he would soon know what she had to say to him. But why had she brought all those papers . . . what was he about to see in them? There was a sick recoil in his soul.

"I did want to have a little talk with you," she went on. "Of course, it's not pleasant to have these ha'penny things with their pictures and their screeching paragraphs. Poor papa, too, stuck in! And Morna! Of course they would have Morna. But why poor papa? And everybody doesn't know it was sunstroke in India. And the Mancini man, too! Oh, James, he is handsome! I met that horrid little Nesta Bache in the park this morning. And she said, 'Oh, my dear, what a beautiful being! I'm not surprised, now, at your sister-in-law.' Of course she does not know Ian. And they did really put in such a

horrid snapshot of Ian. I said to Theophilus this morning: 'One ought to force them to publish at least a decent picture.' I wanted to send the one I have—but——"

"Good God!" said the priest under his breath.

She broke off and looked at him with, all of a sudden, a kind of compassionate shrewdness:

"Yes, I was afraid you'd take it like that. Poor Jimsy! That's what has brought me. But, after all, as Theophilus said, Ian's done the right thing. Cut her off! What? Cut her off. After that letter——"

"Letter?" repeated James.

"Yes, her letter. What, didn't you read it? What, not in your paper? Oh, James, you don't mean to say you don't get a proper paper? Well, I would have thought you'd buy one to read about your own brother! Morna's letter to Ian—when she went off with that Bandini man. It was read in court, you know. Just listen——"

"Oh, no!" cried the other with a groan, starting up and taking the paper from her hand. To hear that story of shame, proclaimed in those cheerful tones, was more than he could endure. "Look here, dear," he went on, hastily, as, with mouth open and heightened color, she stared at him, on the verge of offense: "I'd rather read it all quietly by myself. Will you leave those—those things with me? You said you hadn't a moment, you know."

"No more I have—" she glanced at her watch and shrieked: "I should think I hadn't! It will take me all my time. Good heavens, Jimmy, why do you live in a place like this?"

She sprang up, scattering the papers right and left.

Then glancing at the pale tired face of her brother, as in his turn he rose with unconscious weariness, she exclaimed apologetically:

"Theophilus thought I ought to go about—not to let people think we minded all this . . . horrid business. Not, of course, that it does not happen to everybody nowadays, nearly everybody; but Theophilus thought—you know what I mean, Jimsy, dear, not to sit down under it. What? Theophilus said: 'Put on the chinchillas, old girl, and knock spots out of them all. Show them you're all right.' No good crying over spilt milk, is there? That's what I always say. Poor Morna's only herself to blame—and Ian can start fresh, and he ought to look out for money this time. Don't you think so? What? What do you say, Jimsy?"

He had said nothing. More than ever he felt the futility of any words here. But some mute protest emanating from him had struck her. She really thought he had groaned. Her color changed again, the tears welled into her eyes.

"It isn't as if one could be of any use," she murmured. Then: "Good-bye, Jimsy," she proceeded hurriedly and thrust her cheek for his kiss.

"Good-bye, dear," he said, and almost inaudibly murmured the "God bless you!" which was the only hint of priestly attitude he ever showed her.

Suddenly she clung to him.

"Say a prayer for me, Jimsy!" she said in a gusty whisper, and was gone in such whirlwind speed that the slamming of the front door had shaken the house before he could follow her into the passage.

"Winchester House!" he heard her shout to the footman. Shrugging his shoulders he retraced his steps into the parlor.

The room was full of her scent of heliotrope. He went to the window and flung it open, for it unaccountably nauseated him. The throbbing of the car speeding round the corner was lost in the ceaseless roar of the East End thoroughfare. A hawker was dismally crying her oranges. After the fair, frosty day, the evening was closing in with an acrid threat of fog. An organ burst into the strains of a ragtime tune before the public house at the corner. There was a rush of children's feet down his lane, and a shout of shrill voices. Quickly he shut the window again and turned back into the room.

He picked up the scattered papers; put the lampshade at a convenient angle, and sat down at his writing table.

He must read what he had to read—the record of his family's dishonor, set forth in the public prints, to the accompaniment of all those sounds of sordid life, to the hopping rhythm of that trivial tune, to the mirth of those poor children dancing in the light of the gin palace. "Oranges, sweet oranges," moaned the forlorn voice under his window.

His hand on the illustrated paper he paused. Milly had asked for a prayer. He knew that it meant no more than the flicker of passing sentimentality, and yet he was glad even of that. Nothing is lost where all is counted.

How he had prayed for Ian! All these weeks—for Ian and Morna—for grace and truth and peace upon these two! There was not a child that pattered into his tin chapel, not an old Irishwoman of them all that he had not

bidden to intercede for his intention. Not a penitent had he absolved, not a deathbed had he consecrated, but he had whispered his petition.

He sighed, as he turned over the sheet uppermost to his hand.

ROMANCE IN AN OLD SCOTCH CASTLE
THE ARTIST AND THE LADY
STRANGE LETTER TO A HUSBAND

Black against the column surmounted by these blatant headlines, the turrets of Stronaven! And in three medallions below this inset: Morna's face—the profile of an unknown man—and Ian!

"My God, my God!" He crushed the paper; got up and thrust it into the sullen coal. The flame licked, leaped and flared, roaring up the chimney. He went back to the table, gathered the rest of the sheets with one exception and cast them likewise into the grate. The one exception was the *Scotsman*. He would find all he must see there at least set forth with decency.

When nothing remained of Lady Martindale's journalistic collection but a crackling, writhing, black mass, he came back and spread on the table the sober chronicle he had spared. Leaning his head on his hands, sighing deeply from time to time, oppressed at heart as he was, he resolutely mastered the detail of the Stronaven divorce proceedings. Half a column had sufficed for the reporter. Morna's letter alone had decided the case.

He read and re-read. The thing faced him more than ever with its aspect of incredibility, of incomprehensibility.

When you receive this letter, Ian, I shall have left you forever. Our marriage has become for me a living lie. I realize to the full what I am doing. I am resolved to trust Paolo Concini. He will not betray my trust. You can set yourself free as soon as you wish. Indeed the manner in which I take this step precludes any defense. MORNA.

The blood rushed to his face, and as quickly ebbed. The words danced before his eyes and then settled into their places again, with an extraordinary clearness, stamping themselves on his brain.

Was it possible that Morna had written that to Ian?

"I realize . . . what I am doing." . . . "I shall have left you forever" . . . "set yourself free." Callous, brutal, to a man whose love was still unsuspecting, whose confidence was still complete! . . . "I am resolved to trust Paolo Concini. . . . He will not betray my trust." Was it really Morna who flaunted her lover before her husband? Anger seized him; the veins in his forehead swelled and throbbed; but at the height of passion, a voice cried out to him that he was wrong. Morna did not mean that, never could have meant that—what then? The cold fit settled on him again. The whole letter took an aspect that matched the look in her eyes, in the hidden portrait. She was not callous, she was not brazen. She was as one under a relentless doom. Here was hopeless finality. Then his mind took yet another twist:

"Our marriage has become . . . a living lie." Was that not an actual confession? It was as if a chasm opened before him, into the depths of which he dared not

look. The blackness of it was crossed by flitting shadows too horrible to define.

After a while he roused himself. What purposeless torment of soul to try and solve the unsolvable! The facts were irrefutable. The tragedy was accomplished. The two who had been so nobly and tenderly one were severed forever. Morna was an outcast, repudiated, stained in the eyes of the world. Ian, whose fury had settled down to cynical relentlessness, was free. What was it Milly had said? She hoped "he would choose money next time"—so the world's machinery had disposed of the contract solemnized at the altar of God—"till death do us part!"

The priest glanced at the pale figure on the crucifix; and from it there came to him, stealing, a message. "Forgive them—they know not what they do." Infinitely sad as it was there was comfort in it.

The loud ticking American clock suddenly caught his gaze. He was late already. He folded the paper and thrust it in the drawer of his writing table. He must hurry forth to his poor flock. Out yonder, every circumstance of life fostered sin and sorrow. But yonder, misery itself engendered guilt. He had not another instant to give to those who had deliberately chosen the difficult way of sin and sorrow, instead of the easy good life Providence had laid before them.



BOOK II

"For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity."

Ecclesiastes.



CHAPTER I

MRS. EUGENE DUVENANT was at home at 40 Connaught Place. It was her first entertainment in the fine mansion, which had been practically rebuilt for her under the best expert advice—the hall and staircase, completely overlaid with white marble; the great double drawing-room, an exact copy of Marie Antoinette's salons at Trianon; the boudoir, bought wholesale, rose Gobelins and all, from the country seat of an impoverished English nobleman; the dining-room hung with Spanish leather; and the smoking-room, bought, like the boudoir, as it stood—oak paneling, leaded windows, settles, tiles, brasses and Flemish ware—from a fifteenth-century house in Leyden. It was a display of artistic discrimination and wealth combined, of which Mrs. Duvenant was justly proud.

There was not one cloud upon her horizon. Her friends —as she called those acquaintances of her acquaintances who responded to the bidding of her visiting cards—were goodly in number, cordial and admiring.

The pale yellow draperies, which the cunning Paris *faiseur* had twisted round her willowy figure, harmonized to perfection with both Gobelin pink and Trianon blue. And Oenone, that only child for whom the mother had,

these two years, so strenuously labored—between the Riviera, German watering-places and Claridge's Hotel—looked, it was no partiality to say so, "just a dream!" in her white wisp of a gown.

Every time a powdered-headed and silk-calved footman crossed her field of vision, Mrs. Duvenant's heart swelled with pride.

"There's not one of their duchesses could do it better," she told herself. And it was quite true.

Everything, she was wont to say, depends on getting hold of the right people. When she had secured the interest of persons of such unmistakable distinction as Lady Champers de Morton, the Honorable Matilda Vandeleur, and Lady Victoria Trent, she thought herself nobly launched indeed.

Burke described Champers de Morton as one of the most ancient families of the Kingdom. Miss Vandeleur, an elderly scion of aristocracy, and an undoubted power in the social struggle, of which, indeed, she openly made traffic, had taken up Mrs. Duvenant in the most gratifying manner. As for Lady Victoria Trent, Mrs. Duvenant had regarded the making of her acquaintance at Monte Carlo as the main success of last winter.

A duchess' cousin! This conquest was not likely to be abandoned upon a return to London; and Lady Victoria had been very friendly in accepting a good many invitations and giving her hostess the benefit of her advice upon the new house. She now, not only "turned up," according to promise, at Mrs. Duvenant's first "at home," but brought with her a companion who was instantly assessed

by Mrs. Duvenant as an important addition to her list of "friends."

Lady Martindale was indeed a brilliant apparition in the Trianon drawing-room; and its owner was conscious of a flutter of pleasure as she had advanced to greet her.

"I thought you wouldn't mind my bringing a cousin—" the perfunctory phrase had dropped airily from Lady Victoria's well-reddened lips.

"Pleased to see any relation of yours, Lady Victoria. Delighted to see you, Lady Martindale!"

Mrs. Duvenant was the descendant of a worthy Glasgow merchant who had migrated to, and flourished in Buenos Ayres. She was the wife of that celebrated Argentine millionaire, Eugene Duvenant—one of those successful men whose parentage and early struggles remain a matter of surmise even to their most intimate friends, but one about whose present wealth and power there cannot be two opinions.

If she had not yet quite assimilated the accent, the phraseology and manner of the particular London set to which she was determined to belong, there was nothing about her that saliently disqualified her for it. Certain traits she had inherited with her Scotch blood—an air of reserve and a natural sense of consequence which stood her in good stead.

As she now advanced to receive her visitors, her assured address, her soft voice, her slim, pretty figure, with its tired charm and its exquisite French garments, made an unexpectedly pleasant impression upon the newcomer—who, being of a frank habit, beamed on her with the most open approval.

"Vic told me all about your wonderful house. What? Oh, it's lovely. . . . lovely! Is that your girl? Oh, good gracious, Vicky," said Lady Martindale, turning impulsively upon her cousin—"delicious!"

"I told you she was a ripper!" cried Lady Victoria.

The latter was a thin, black-haired woman, with a fine emaciated face and bold eyes that wandered discontentedly as if ever in search of something; the kind of woman who looks her best on horseback, is at her brightest in the smoking-room. There could not have been a greater contrast to the blooming femininity of Millicent Martindale; yet the two, as they sipped iced coffee, and slung jokes across their hostess at each other—exchanging comments on people and places Mrs. Duvenant had never heard of, seemed to her, somehow, equally apart, in an atmosphere of their own. Instinctively the climber recognized—as she vaguely phrased it to herself—"the real thing."

She was proportionately flattered by Lady Martindale's affability; and when, on parting, it was suggested that she should lunch the very next day with her new friend, and thereafter be driven to Ranelagh, she could hardly conceal her elation.

But, almost from the outset of the lunch in question, Lady Martindale's conversation proved disconcerting. Mrs. Duvenant was thin-skinned. She moved in an atmosphere of deliberate dignity which, if it had not been for a certain Southern grace, might have been called pompous. All her society intercourse was marked with convention. She was polite in her every phrase, to the verge of pedantry. Into this pretty, formal garden, as it were, Lady

Martindale dashed like an irrepressible retriever puppy.

"Charming house!" she began, between large mouthfuls of her own excellent *omelette aux pointes d'asperges.* "Charming house, that of yours, Mrs. Duvenant."

Millicent Martindale had an unconquerable difficulty in mastering other people's names, or indeed any word to which her ear was unused. But as it never impeded the fluency of her speech, and it was quite useless to correct her, her friends rather enjoyed the peculiarity. But Mrs. Duvenant perceptibly stiffened.

"I am glad you like it, Lady Martindale," she answered, emphasizing the superior breeding of her memory.

"Charming!" repeated her hostess. They were *en partie fine,* for reasons of Millicent's own. "Rather a pity, though, to have set up on the wrong side of the Park —What!" Then, swift enough to perceive the offended consternation that spread itself on the delicate face opposite to her, she proceeded, not to apologize, but to expound her point of view. "Oh, it's quite nice and all that! Nobody could say it was anything but a lovely house. But the situation a bit Jew, and Greek, isn't it? Oh, you know what I mean. Nice people like you—well, you know what I mean—Hill Street or Belgrave Square—Park Lane. What? You get just as good a house in Park Lane."

Mrs. Duvenant crumbled her roll with an angry spasm of frail fingers.

"I am on the Park—or very close to Hyde Park," she murmured resentfully. But it was only the first blow.

"Lovely drawing-rooms!" Millicent continued good-naturedly, "copy of Trianon, isn't it? Pity you did not

keep the whole house Eighteenth Century. What? Such a shock, you know, walking into that black-panel room. Kind of jar. Oh, I dare say I'm silly. I always feel like that." She flung a complacent look round her own handsome Georgian room. "Everything is Adam or Chippendale here. I don't mind a century—or two. But to skip from your Empire to Medieval—a bit anachromatic. What? Anachromatic, you know." Doubtful about the word, she repeated it several times, firmly, to settle the question.

Mrs. Duvenant would have been seriously offended, was indeed drawing up into herself like a sea anemone, when her entertainer's next remarks diverted her feelings into more agreeable channels.

"Vicky told me you'd a very pretty girl. Awfully pretty!" she said. "Made me quite curious. Really came to see her, the other day, you know. And I don't think Vic said half enough about her. I don't know," proceeded Lady Martindale meditatively, popping one olive after another into her mouth, between two courses, "I don't know when I've seen anything prettier. Piquante, you know. What? Piquante and graceful. Of course she could hardly help to be graceful, your daughter, Mrs. Dallincourt."

The blood mounted pleasurably into the mother's face. The new liberty taken with her name she pardoned. She would pardon all this dear lady's eccentricities in the future for the sake of her genuine enthusiasm.

"Yes, my Nonny is a sweet creature," she admitted smilingly. "And just as lovable as she's sweet."

"Oh, yes, lovely!" cried the other. "Such a dear little

tip-tilted nose! and such a fascinating frock! Just the right thing; white chiffon, blue ribbon and a rose. No girl should ever have anything else, to my mind. Looks so simple and all that, but I daresay—Paris? Awful price, what?"

And, as Mrs. Duvenant modestly admitted Paris, and by implication, awful price, her interlocutor pursued with increased good humor:

"Of course you millionaires don't care what you pay, do you? But then, Vic said, she's your only child?" The interrogation slipped out with as much apparent carelessness as the rest of the babble; but it was accompanied by a glance that was anything but careless.

"My only child," conceded Mrs. Duvenant in her soft, precise voice.

"Your only child! What?—Oh well." There was so much satisfaction in the interjection and the beaming air that accompanied it, that Mrs. Duvenant smiled back as if the sun had suddenly risen and illumined her mental horizon. Peculiar, Lady Martindale certainly was; but, how pleasant, when one became a little intimate and understood her offhand manner!

"Oenone has always absorbed all my thoughts," she said a little later, as they sipped the Turkish coffee in the gray and gold morning-room, which was full of bunches of mauve lilac from Martindale Towers and littered with knick-knacks and photographs. These last, Mrs. Duvenant examined surreptitiously whenever she could. They were, many of them, faces familiar to her, from her Riviera winters and her solicitous study of Society papers. At her very elbow stood the presentment of the Duchess

cousin, whose acquaintance Lady Victoria had never passed on. "*Darling Millie—your Rose*" ran the inscription in a dashing hand across one corner. Her heart began to swell still more agreeably than over the silk-stockinged footmen. To be on such friendly terms with two cousins of one duchess—a simple sum in social arithmetic—the result must be a noble addition to her visiting list.

She glided into a dream, rehearsing phrases for her next letter home: "I have just given a little lunch in honor of the Duchess of Monmouth. I wish you had been present, dear Inez," or: "The Duchess of Monmouth was saying to me the other day—such a delightful woman, I feel quite sorry that her boys are still at Eton——"

She was interrupted by Lady Martindale, who, having heard that the car was at the door, was seized with a frenzy for instant departure, and literally hustled her guest to the hall door, screaming for her maid and cloak in one breath, and for her footman and cushion in the next.

Her mauve tulle toque, with its giant bunch of pansies, was rakishly lurching over one ear.

She refused to have it set straight, with a good-natured but determined: "How silly you are, Jenkins!" and brushed aside the motor veil proffered by the abigail.

"We'll have a chat. What? Talk more comfortably driving. Get in, get in!—Ranelagh—I said Ranelagh! Hurry up! Tell Watkins not to drive fast." Her eyes were dancing, as she turned to Mrs. Duvenant. "This is nice, isn't it? I'll run your girl down to Ranelagh, some Saturday. And then, with the most complete irrelevance,

"You'll have to come and meet my brother—the Master of Stronaven. What! He's just home from big-game shooting. I wish I'd shown you his photograph."

Having said this, Lady Martindale suddenly blushed violently, declared it was too hot for anything, and dropped the window nearest to her.

In spite of the recklessness with which she plunged along her own way, Millicent Martindale was subject to sensitive twinges. She was now asking herself, with childish sidelong glances at her companion, whether Mrs. Duvenant knew anything about Ian's divorce—whether she had seen the curt announcement which had appeared in last week's paper making absolute the decree *nisi*—whether, in the circumstances, this was playing her cards too openly. Not that people, nowadays, had any prejudices on the subject of divorce—Argentines certainly couldn't have. She thought they would probably rather like it. She did hope she would get out of this idiotic way of blushing over Ianny. It was a nuisance, anyhow, all round—why on earth Morna should have made such a fool of herself and of her whole family!

Mrs. Duvenant, shrewd enough generally, failed to perceive her companion's agitation. She had indeed instantly perceived the connection between Lady Martindale's sudden mention of her brother, and her outspoken admiration for Oenone. And the fact had caused her neither surprise nor agitation. She herself could never hear of an eligible man without considering him as a possible mate for her Nonny. But it was title of "Master," hitherto unmet during her social explorations, that ar-

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rested her attention. And while, indomitably polite, she murmured her regret not to have been afforded a sight of the portrait in question, she was devoutly hoping she might not betray her ignorance.

The irritation caused by her unwonted sense of discomfort colored Lady Martindale's next remarks. Breaking through Mrs. Duvenant's neatly turned phrases, she exclaimed peevishly:

"What, in heaven's name made you fix upon poor Vicky?"

"Poor Vicky . . . ?" ejaculated the other, helpless.

"Yes—Vicky. Vicky Trent. My goodness, didn't you know?"

"What?" gasped the mother. She was a nervous woman, and she blanched to the lips.

"My dear Mrs. Dalrymple . . . don't you know? Everybody knows about poor Vicky. Oh, of course, you Argentines wouldn't mind about divorce—nobody does in Australia—" her mind looping back to her previous thoughts—"but there are divorces and divorces. Poor Vicky was mixed up in the Bewlay case, you remember? Louise Bewlay divorced Sir Richard on account of her—chiefly. Poor Vicky isn't even divorced, herself, you see! Tom Trent is such a creature. He wouldn't do it—just to spite her."

"Are you speaking," Mrs. Duvenant found the words with difficulty, "can it be possible that you are speaking of Lady Victoria Trent?"

Millicent opened her blue eyes, astonished and impatient, yet breezily good humored. How stupid the woman was!

"Of course. Who else? Poor Vicky! Did you imag-

ine for one moment that Vicky could be any use to anybody—to get anybody on, I mean? How could she? What? Certainly not the kind of person to take your daughter about. Good gracious, fancy sending a girl round with Vicky!"

Mrs. Duvenant sat for a minute stunned, all her happy social palace collapsing about her like a house of cards. She felt outraged, and tried to remain incredulous.

"Really, Lady Martindale," she said with an angry titter, "forgive me, but this seems very extraordinary. Did you not yourself accompany Lady Victoria to my house, last Thursday?"

"I?—Of course! She's my own cousin. Poor old Vic!"

Lady Martindale's eyebrows were arched, and her resonant voice was high-pitched.

"And—and," Mrs. Duvenant was shaken by a tremor, as she proceeded desperately, "last winter at Monte Carlo where I made her acquaintance, she and the Duchess of Monmouth were inseparable."

"But, of course!" screamed Lady Martindale. "Same thing there. She's a cousin, too. Rosy Monmouth and I and Vic are all cousins!"

Mrs. Duvenant put her hand to her brow, feebly. Her nerves were going "all to pieces," as she was wont to explain it, and she knew she would have a headache tonight. Lady Martindale's next remark carried home the dread conviction of blunder.

"Do you know Rosy Monmouth? Did Vicky introduce you? Oh, I thought not. Poor Vic, she knew better."

No, Mrs. Duvenant had not been introduced to the Duchess of Monmouth. Little memories flashed back on

her mind, of Lady Victoria's evasions, her offhand excuses; of that occasion when she had deliberately cut her in the gambling rooms; of that other occasion when, arm in arm with the Duchess, she had dropped her muff and bent in order to avoid a face to face meeting on the terrace.

"And Rosy so fond of millionaires!" pursued her tormentor cheerfully.

Here there was a pause. Mrs. Duvenant had looked expectantly, a flush rising in her delicate cheek, a gleam of hope springing in her eye. What more natural than that the respectable cousin should make up for the deficiencies of the damaged one? But she waited in vain. Lady Martindale had fallen into silence, her bright blue orbs smilingly fixed on her companion, as if she had just been making the most agreeable conversation in the world. Mrs. Duvenant swallowed a lump in her throat and again sought for words in which she might, with frozen dignity, express her condemnation of social tenets so loose and misleading.

They were dodging the traffic on Hammersmith Bridge, now and again pulled up short by the gliding menace of a tram. She wished heartily she had not come upon this drive. It was all so noisy, such horrible streets. She was quite certain to have that headache.

"I'm sure," she said at last, as they slipped on again and the quiet of a free road gathered about their swift advance, "I ought to be very grateful to you, Lady Martindale, for giving me this warning. I'm sure it must have been very painful to you, to have to make such revelations concerning so close a relative. I'm only a stranger in this land—" the Argentine's soft voice took unwonted

tones of acidity—"and, I'm afraid, still ignorant of your London ways. When I saw a person countenanced in public by one of England's greatest ladies, it was natural I should believe her—" she was going to say "at least respectable," but prudence overcame exasperation, and she altered the remark to one of plaintive mock-humility; "it was natural that I should think her fit company for a simple person like myself."

"Oh, it doesn't matter about you," was the unexpected answer to her subtle sarcasm. "It is the child, you know. The girl. What! Such a nice girl! You can't let her pick up with Vicky's riff-raff. Not that quite nice men don't stick to Vicky, but—" Lady Martindale was never good at expressing shades of delicacy, so she concluded, clumsily: "No good, you know, their taking up with her as one of Vicky's sort. What?"

Mrs. Duvenant gave a little sobbing ejaculation of "Oh dear!" and thereafter, in silence, chewed the cud of exceedingly bitter reflection, until the green of Ranelagh caught them into its fresh embrace.

The result of her cogitations, however, was an increased appreciation of the value of this new acquaintance. More than ever, Lady Martindale appeared to her as the "real thing." And over the Ceylon tea, the tasteless bread and butter and the sawdusty cakes provided by the Club, she determined to put her mind at rest on the subject of her two other social godmothers.

If the process of enlightenment was painful it was mercifully brief.

"Lady Champers—what? Champers de Morton's wife? No. Nobody knows her. Oh, she's quite respectable and

all that. Poor little dowdy thing, it's not her fault that Horace Champers—well, no one can have Horace Champers near the place!"

Falteringly, Mrs. Duvenant admitted that she had heard he was rather a fast man.

"Fast? It is not that, my dear Mrs. Datchment. He's been kicked out of the Clubs. And he's everybody's cousin. It would be awkward if one were to meet him—what!"

Mystery thickened about the bewildered listener. The peccant Vicky could only be known by her cousins; but the erring Champers could not be known at all because he was everybody's cousin. She gave it up; and with an effort which cost her a gasp, finally mentioned Miss Vandeleur's name. Here at last the cloud seemed about to lift.

"Tilly? Oh, Tilly's all right. Tilly's a good old sort."

Lady Martindale was very fond of Tilly—quite a useful person. She was devouring the unspeakable cakes with as wholesale an appetite as that which she had displayed at her own excellent table, while, between chronic dyspepsia and agitation, Mrs. Duvenant was quite unable to swallow more than that first mouthful of bread and butter.

"Make use of Tilly," proceeded the adviser; "she knows quite good people." Then a shrewd glint came into her speed-well-blue eyes. "I hope," she asked, "that she's doing you well. None of her second-bests or third-rates—What? She's three lists you know. Hightem, tightem and grubbem, Aha! Has she sent you a card for the Havillands? I know she's helping Lady Gertrude. No? Nor to the Steinhagens? Nor to the Johnny Harper's

Russian evening? Pavlova, my dear—Pavlova and a stage built out. Regent's Park, you know, quite a little country house in London. No? Not even for Lady Renfrew's cotillion? That's too bad of Tilly! What cards has she sent you?"

At the first name, Lady Martindale screamed such disapproval that her companion glanced agonizingly round, lest there should be an audience for her humiliation. But it was too early in the season, and an off day; they had the terrace to themselves.

"What? the Chichester Howards! Those dowdy dull people!"

It was quite clear, Tilly had put Mrs. Duvenant in her second list.

"You must speak to her," said Lady Martindale briskly. "She must get you to the right places."

"Oh, Lady Martindale!" Mrs. Duvenant's small, tired face blazed, "I could not think of such a thing!" She choked. "I should never wish to accept any invitation through Miss Vandeleur again."

It was Millicent's turn to stare. "How odd and huffy of her!" she was thinking. "How silly! and she wants to get out!" But an elementary good breeding prevented her from pressing the point. And the hand that had dealt the wound, now proceeded to administer balm.

Lady Martindale was a dinner-giver for the Renfrews' dance. Would Mrs. Duvenant intrust her nice child to her for that evening? "I'll see that she has a good time."

Before reaching Connaught Place, Lady Martindale had an inspiration. Might she bring her brother, she

asked—"the Master of Stronaven, you know"—to see the wonderful house? "He'd be so interested. Shall I bring him next Thursday?" She colored again, but her eyes were fixed and valiant. "He's quite brown. Burned copper. Just back from Central Africa. Suits him, I think." Suddenly the fixed glance became suffused. "He had to go away to distract his mind, poor boy. Of course you know all about it. It's quite over, thank goodness. Good-bye, Thursday then."

Mrs. Duvenant staggered into the marble hall, one delicate hand pressed to a throbbing temple. But it was not to rest. Exhausted, bodily and mentally, though she was; disturbed, vexed and unsettled, she had business before her which could not be delayed. She sat down—in the fifteenth-century smoking-room—without even removing her hat, and wrote three letters!

DEAR LADY VICTORIA,

I am afraid Oenone cannot go with you to Sandown tomorrow, as you kindly asked her.

What excuse could she give? It might not be safe to make an enemy here.

The poor child has a slight sore throat.

Well, that was disposed of.

DEAR LADY CHAMPERS,

Much to my regret, I fear I cannot after all lunch with you tomorrow. An unexpected engagement has arisen.

She need not be too explicit with Lady Champers de Morton. It was impossible to forget the contemptuous accents in which Lady Martindale had dismissed her.

As she took up the third sheet of paper, she began to tremble with a return of nervous anger. Miss Vandeleur had behaved shamefully. Shamefully! She could not be friendly ever in that quarter again. No excuse should be given to Miss Vandeleur.

I am sorry I cannot come to tea tomorrow.

She was to have met a series of prospective hostesses. In fact, the entertainment had ostensibly been planned for her benefit; and she had been dupe enough to feel, and express, gratitude!

But before retiring to bed with a compress of Florida water over her aching head, she had set herself another task to accomplish.

Burke's massive volumes stood to her hand, flanked by that smaller but not less valuable production, "Who's Who." She hastily sought in the latter first:

Stronaven. Her heart leapt as the entry caught her eyes.

Stronaven, Master of, Hon. Ian Roderick Charles MacIvor; e. s. and heir to seventh Baron Stronaven; b. 4 April, 1877. m. 1900 Morna, o. c. of the late Alexander MacIvor of Rushven. Heir: brother, Hon. and Rev. James Alexander MacIvor.

Bewildered and disappointed, she read and re-read the brief statements. Married! Delightful, romantic, distin-

guished as it sounded . . . Master of Stronaven, what a pretty title . . . and the future eighth baron . . . what was the good of it, if he were married!

Her head throbbed so dreadfully that she had an impulse to close the book; almost to reconsider her recent correspondence. Yet, as she pondered, she recalled that Lady Martindale's advances had been as unmistakable as her manner had been full of meaning. She weighed possibilities. He was perhaps a recent widower. . . . There were certainly no children of the marriage. Again she assured herself of the advantageous fact. Then a light struck her. Lady Martindale had spoken of her brother in tones of pity it is true, but not as one speaks of a man in sorrow.

"Poor boy," she had said and had made reference to something as being "quite over." *The Master of Stronaven was divorced. . . .*

She paused once more, frowning against the pain; striving to focus the new aspect. The wife—she wondered what they called the wife of a Master—had, evidently, been the erring party . . . and he had divorced her. If matters stood thus—and she must ascertain exactly the attitude of the best English Society toward divorce—he might still be eligible. Anyhow the family was worth reading about. She took up the book again:

> Stronaven 7th Baron. cr. 1746 Alexander Ian Frederick MacIvor, DL, representative peer for Scotland since 1879. b. May 10, 1832, s. 6th Baron and Lady Mary Charlotte Trevor-Ross, d. of 5th Duke of Monmouth. m. 1876 Lady Hermione Iso-

bel Buchan, d. of third Marquis of Lohmond. Capt. Royal Highlanders, served in Crimean War, 1855. Indian Mutiny, 1857 . . . owns 103,000 acres. Address: Stronaven Castle, Inverness. Skene. Angus. Stronaven House, Moray Square, Edinburgh. Clubs: Carlton.

Pressing one hand to her temple, Mrs. Duvenant made her way upstairs. The names, the titles, the residences, danced through her throbbing brain, as in flashes of colored light, illuminating a long perspective of splendors. Scotch by both parents, she had naturally inherited an immense respect for "birth." It had been a family tradition that Hector MacKie, of Glasgow, and Jenny Macfarlane of the same town, could claim kinship with ancient stock. Anyhow, Mrs. Duvenant had never seen why this shouldn't be the case, and since settling in England, had more than once planned to take the required steps to establish the fact—she understood that it was mainly a question of expense. An alliance for her Oenone with an historic Highland house . . . !

Once in her room she stood for a while absorbed in reflections; then rang sharply for her maid and bade her fetch back the letter addressed to the Honorable Matilda Vandeleur. Although she had been justly wroth with the double-dealing Matilda, she regarded social advancement too seriously to allow her feelings to interfere.

Lady Martindale had said: "Tilly's all right. Miss Vandeleur might still be of immense service as pilot through

the shoals, the rocks and quicksands which beset the stranger's bark upon these doubtful waters.

Indeed, Mrs. Duvenant could think of no one else to turn to. She flung the irate letter into the small wood-fire which, in all seasons, flickered on her bedroom hearth. No, she would not break off relations. Not that she intended to go and meet the "second set" hostesses on the following afternoon—that would be not only a weakness but a mistake—but the Honorable Matilda should be summoned to make herself useful at Mrs. Duvenant's convenience.

"I'll telephone to her to come in the morning tomorrow," she said to herself, as she sank with relief upon her pillows.

A couple of hours ago the wife of the Argentine millionaire would not have dreamed of treating a relative of the English nobility in this independent fashion; but, singularly enough, one result of Lady Martindale's ruthless disclosures had been an increased sense of personal importance.

"I think she'll come," said the woman of wealth to herself. "She won't want me to drop her."

CHAPTER II

MATILDA VANDELEUR stood in the Gobelin boudoir, in a manlike attitude, her back to the fireplace, gazing at Mrs. Duvenant. The effort of keeping her single eye-glass in one shrewd eye gave a wrinkled, doubtful expression to her ruddy face. She

was the kind of woman who clothed herself, whenever possible, in "tailor-mades"; wore masculine skirts, and hats that only a quill or a knot of ribbon prevented from being masculine, too.

"Not coming to my show this afternoon?" she was expostulating, in deep tones of annoyance. "But my dear, good creature, you must! I've asked the giddy throng on purpose to meet you. Well, you'll send the girl, I suppose? They're all giving dances, you know."

Mrs. Duvenant, in an exquisite pale-gray morning frock, looking peculiarly feminine beside her visitor's solid personality, turned the rings on her small white hands; but it was the only sign of nervousness she gave, as she proceeded on her well-rehearsed discourse:

"I'm very sorry—" the slight exotic accent gave emphasis to her soft utterance—"I am really very sorry, but so many new engagements claim us! I have promised to bring Oenone to two or three places."

Mrs. Vandeleur screwed her glass more firmly into her eye, and blinking with the other, stared fixedly at the speaker. The inwardness of the situation had not yet dawned upon her.

"Oh, but you must come!" she repeated. "Lady Chichester Howard has put off several things to meet you. And as her dance is on Friday——"

Mrs. Duvenant raised her eyes, which were very beautiful and lustrous, and gazed up at her friend:

"I am not going to Lady Chichester Howard's," she said with a gentleness that was almost deadly.

The glass dropped against Matilda's coat buttons with a click.

"Not going to the Chichester Howards'!" she ejaculated.

"I have just written all my regrets. Oenone is joining Lady Martindale's dinner for Lady Renfrew's cotillion."

"Oh, really!" said Matilda. She moved away from the hearth and sat down heavily on the bergère nearest Mrs. Duvenant.

"Yes," went on the latter, her voice ever softer in her hidden triumph. "And you were also kind enough to send me a card for Lady Brandon's next week."

"It's going to be quite good," said Miss Vandeleur firmly. "All kinds of clever young men. . . . He's a very distinguished judge, you know, and——"

"I shall not bring Oenone there," said the mother. "I do not wish her to be seen in too many crowded ballrooms during her first season. Just at a few of the best houses, only."

Miss Vandeleur stopped herself in time from whistling. "Has Millicent Martindale been giving me away?" she thought, but dismissed the idea instantly: Milly was too irresponsible, too good-natured, and too indifferent.

"And what houses were you thinking of?" she asked, not altogether innocent of sarcasm.

"Houses such as that of Lady Renfrew's," answered the other imperturbably. Then she added after a pause: "as that of Mrs. Havilland——"

"Well, as it happens, I can manage Mrs. Havilland for you," said Miss Vandeleur, cheerfully making up her mind. "I am helping her."

Mrs. Duvenant inclined her head in regal fashion.

"That will be very nice," she said without enthusiasm. "And do you happen to know Mrs. Steinhagen?"

"Oh, that's impossible," put in the social go-between quickly. "Yes, yes, I know, I'm helping there, too, but she won't have you."

The color sprang to her listener's cheek.

"You needn't look like that!" exclaimed Matilda. "It's absurd, of course. But not quite so idiotic as it sounds. She's got a couple of girls to marry off. Yes, my dear, heiresses, of course, but plain things with noses—so there it is, your child's far too good-looking. But if you'd like a card for the Harpers, they've got their show on next week."

"Perhaps, if I may leave it open," said Mrs. Duvenant.

Miss Vandeleur burst out laughing.

"Oh, you'd better say yes at once," she cried. "You'll meet the best there, anyhow."

"I always wish to meet the best, Miss Vandeleur," was the reply.

Tilly picked up her eye-glass and considered Mrs. Duvenant a moment in silent admiration.

"Well," she said, on another peal of laughter, "that's all right, and I am sure I don't see why you shouldn't." There was another slight pause; then the spinster went on, with marked intention through her offhand manner: "So long, of course, as you don't have people like Vicky Trent, or that Champers woman, about the place."

"Riviera acquaintances," said Mrs. Duvenant with a plaintive condescension. "It's a very difficult thing to avoid introductions on the Riviera. But in London—" she paused, "London, of course, is quite different."

"Of course it is," echoed Miss Vandeleur heartily.

They now thoroughly understood each other. Mrs. Duvenant was satisfied that nothing short of "hightem" would be ever offered to her again. And Miss Vandeleur was mentally reviewing her Number One list to see where she could still slip in the rich Argentine and her pretty daughter. Though this meant a great deal more trouble, and less remuneration in the long run than with Number Two, which was comfortably grateful for anything she chose to suggest, she realized that she had no alternative if she did not wish to lose a too valuable asset. But, her mind still roving on the possible source of Mrs. Duvenant's sudden enlightenment, she deliberately brought the conversation back to the subject of Lady Martindale.

Mrs. Duvenant, concealing her pleasure at having the opening made for her, gave languid and circumspect replies to her visitor's direct questions. Yes, of course she had met Lady Martindale. If Miss Vandeleur had not been so late, last Thursday, she would have met her in this house. She seemed a charming woman. Then, with perfectly assumed carelessness:

"She was a Miss MacIvor, wasn't she?"

"Oh dear, yes. Daughter of the old, mad lord."

The statement was so unexpected, that Mrs. Duvenant could not repress a start.

"Do I understand you to say that Lord Stronaven is mad?"

It was on the tip of Matilda's ruthless tongue to exclaim: "They're *all* mad as hatters!" But the train of thought suggested by her companion's startled look made her pause.

"Sits the wind in that quarter?" she said to herself. "That's what Milly Martindale is taking them up for. Well, I'll not spoil sport." She was never one to spoil sport; for besides being naturally good-natured, it did not pay, in her line of life. Everyone knew the cause of Lord Stronaven's condition.

"Nothing hereditary, you know," she answered bluntly. "Sunstroke in India." Then, as a betraying flush rose in her hostess' face, she proceeded: "You heard about the son, I suppose? I wonder if he'll marry again?"

"I don't quite understand what happened," said Mrs. Duvenant diplomatically. "The son? You refer, I suppose, to the Master of Stronaven?"

"Oh, he wasn't in the least to blame. Everyone's sympathy was with him. Didn't you read about it? She ran away with a painter."

"Painter!" ejaculated the Argentine with horror.

"He was painting her portrait, you know. I never knew her myself. They were hardly ever in London. But people used to rave about her."

"You mean . . . " Mrs. Duvenant put her hand to her brow as if bewildered. "Who are you speaking of, dear Miss Vandeleur?" she asked in her plaintive tone.

"But Mrs. MacIvor, of course."

Mrs. Duvenant drew a breath of relief: she now knew how to speak of the wife of the Master of Stronaven.

Miss Vandeleur's shrewd wits were working briskly. All was clear as crystal. Milly Martindale intended to marry her brother to the desirable heiress. With the immense social force of the Monmouths behind her and their wide connection, she was not likely to fail. If Oenone

Duvenant was to be married off in this manner, then Matilda Vandeleur must be of the business. She gave two or three more items of information on the subject of the Stronavens, careful to be on the eulogistic side.

"There's a brother, a priest, a Roman Catholic priest." No—it wasn't such a shock as all that. Quite a lot of good people were Roman Catholic, these days. She had heard the Duke of Monmouth say only the other day that it was a jolly good thing, as now Ian would have to marry again. Oh, he simply would have to! Mrs. Duvenant had no idea what these old Scotch people felt about their name, their lands and all that. "It is a tremendous family, you know."

Mrs. Duvenant remarked that—being herself descended, on both sides, from two celebrated Highland clans, she had every idea——

Tilly stared.

"My mother was a Forbes—and my father one of the Mackies—you have heard of the Mackies. We have papers," said Mrs. Duvenant with magnificent vagueness.

It was all that Miss Vandeleur could do to preserve a becoming gravity. Her protégée was advancing very rapidly indeed. She only trusted that she might be able to keep up with her.

Mrs. Duvenant sailed down to lunch presently, upon the most affable terms with the being whom, the day before, she had vowed to cut off from her acquaintance. And the direct result of the interview was a note to Lady Martindale, inviting her to name a day for bringing the Master of Stronaven to lunch at Connaught Place.

CHAPTER III

THE Master of Stronaven had returned to London without warning any of his relations. But the day after the decree concerning his divorce had been declared absolute, he walked in upon his sister just before lunch time.

Lady Martindale checked her joyful outcry midway and with odd effect:

"Oh, Ian, Ian, dear boy!" it was here she broke off, murmuring inarticulately: "Fancy! Had not the least idea!" and stood scarlet under his perfunctory kiss. She had indeed not the least idea in what frame of mind she would find her brother; and this first meeting after the great catastrophe seemed suddenly terrible to her. "I thought you were still in the wilds. What? It's really you, is it?" Her glance dared not settle itself upon him. But the next moment the sound of his laugh and of the boisterous tones in which he answered her, brought a delighted revulsion:

"Yes, old girl, it's I, right enough."

She had never been "old girl" to her brother unless he happened to be in a very good humor with her. And this, for some reason she had never understood, was the rarest occurrence. Up rushed her mercurial spirits with a bound. She stepped back and contemplated him, incoherent words of pleasure escaping her.

"How well you look! . . . My goodness, Ian! You *are* brown! Splendid! Never saw anything so brown. Copper, Ian, copper! A perfect Red Indian! Lions and elephants

agreed with you. What? You'll lunch? Where are you staying? Oh, do sit down. You'll put up here? No? You must. Well, never mind! It's awfully jolly to see you! . . . Fancy your being in London again! Funny! I've been thinking of you all the morning——"

With her usual recklessness she was rushing upon dangerous ground when a flash from the blue eyes that shone with such singular luminosity out of the tanned face brought her up short. She put her hand to her lips with the gesture of a child. It was evident she was not to speak of that. She was, therefore, the more astonished when he himself remarked, in the voice which her ear, unattuned to niceties, had welcomed as cheerful:

"Yes, of course you were. You saw the paragraphs, I suppose. Well, yes, that's what brought me back. It's over and done with. Over and done with!" he repeated loudly.

He flung his arms out with a fierce gesture, swiftly controlled. Millicent babbled:

"Yes, yes . . . of course! So glad, dear boy, of course I saw it . . . You were so wise! Of course, the only thing! Start fresh now. Oh, dear, when I think of Morna——"

The Master sprang violently to his feet; and, as before, the indiscreet speaker fell into paralized silence. For one second, she had thought her brother looked at her as if he might have struck her. But, with her easy optimism, she persuaded herself she had been mistaken; for, almost immediately, in quite calm tones, he said:

"That will do, Milly. Yes, I'll lunch, thank you. We've time for a little chat first, haven't we?"

He moved restlessly about the room; then flung himself

in an almost reclining attitude on the sofa. He told her, irrelevantly, that the flowers were fine; cut her short in the middle of an enthusiastic description of her new iris garden, and, sitting up suddenly, his thin, brown hands round his knees, exclaimed with a laugh which so enchanted her:

"I've come back to civilization. Now what are you going to do to amuse me?"

She was voluble in suggestion. A little dinner at the Savoy, and "Baby Desroses" at the Palace . . . And afterwards they might look in at Christopher Basset's cabaret party. "In his studio, you know. Great fun!"

The Master's mobile eyebrows were lifted.

"Is that how you're amusing yourselves over here? Remember, I've come from among respectable savages, and you must let me down by degrees."

Lady Martindale giggled uncertainly.

"How silly you are!"

"I don't want that kind of a show, Milly," he went on. "I suppose there are some decent people left in London? If I wanted that species of racket I shouldn't come to you for it."

He was speaking very deliberately, and the last phrase came slowly, as if weighted with meaning. With a wavering smile on her lips, her blue eyes filled with perplexity, she sat, fixing him. A quiver of impatience passed over his face. The grip that clasped his knees was tightened.

"Can't you make some better suggestion?" His voice had taken a ragged sound as if the words hurt him. "Do you remember what you wrote to me after—after I had gone abroad?"

"Oh, Ian!" she exclaimed, leaping from her chair, each

cheek a flaming rose, her eyes dancing. "Ian, darling, you don't mean that!"

He put her from him with a quick gesture, got up and stood away.

"Milly, don't!"

The tone was that of one cursing. But, in her joy, she was quite indifferent. She belonged to that type of woman who philosophically regard their men folk as more or less unaccountable beings. "Men are so odd" was sufficient explanation for any masculine emotion she could not understand. Already she was excitedly running over in her mind the different girls of her acquaintance who might suit Ian.

"Of course, dear boy, I knew you'd see the necessity—so sensible—the only thing to be done. I am pleased, I must say, you should have made up your mind so quickly."

"'That which thou doest, do quickly,'" quoted he, speaking between his teeth. He went to the window, came back again, while her bubbling thoughts found incoherent expression:

"The Renfrew girl—pretty little thing—but delicate. No, that would not do. And, of course, there must be money."

He stopped in his nervous walk, sat astride a gilt chair, and, propping his elbows on the back of it, his chin on his clasped fingers, looked at her.

"There may as well be money," he said harshly.

She stared.

"There must be money," she repeated. Ian had grown disconcertingly sensible. "Then the Steinhagen girls—

rolling—South African—half a million apiece. But you couldn't, you know—frights!"

"Look here," he cut in abruptly. "I'll tell you what I want, then you can look out for it. She must be young; quite young, in her first season—not a stager. None of your Tango girls. Innocent—you understand. Really innocent. Pretty, of course. Looks. Money. Yes," he repeated slowly, "money . . . to give it a chance."

"Well, Ian, you are . . . ! Perfection, that's what you want. What?" crowed his sister, noisy against her undefined discomfiture. "Perfection—What?" she repeated. "Everything a girl can bring."

"Not at all." He got up, swung the light chair he had been sitting on, and set it meticulously down on the same spot. "I haven't asked for brains, or blood, or—" he paused, a spasm twitched his lips, and he laughed—"or for a loving disposition. She must have good health, though—fact is," he said bitterly, "we must think of the race—Oh, for Heaven's sake—!" Again a burst of irritability shook him as she resumed her inventory.

"Sophy Laland's girl," she was saying. "Lovely, I hear. But they're so High Church! She'd never let her marry a——"

"Well, see what you can do, Milly. But don't trumpet it all over the town. How are the kiddies? No, no, don't send for them, there's a good girl. Afraid I can't lunch after all. Sorry!" He bore down her outcry. "Forgot I'd promised a fellow at the Club—Good-bye! I'll expect to hear from you."

"What?"

He was at the door.

"I know you'll manage it all right. Don't make me say it all over again just for the fun of the thing. Good-bye." He nodded to her. His white teeth flashed through his dark beard, and he was gone.

She heard him whistling a Highland lilt as he ran downstairs.

"He *is* in good spirits," she said to herself, encouraging her own buoyancy. "Who would have thought Ian would take it like that!"

Later on she conveyed the same impression to Sir Theophilus.

"So sorry you missed Ian, Phil. You never saw anything so well as he looks. He's on for everything."

To the superficial it might seem that, impulsive creature as she was, she would have further confided the whole conversation to her husband. But she had odd twists of circumspection, where her own family was concerned. "He's on for everything," she repeated, "and as jolly as a sandboy!"

"I should think so. Sensible chap, Ian," said Sir Theophilus.

"He doesn't seem one bit upset now," she went on, helping herself copiously to *risotto* from the silver chafing dish before her. Sir Theophilus objected to servants in the room at lunch time.

"I should think not," corroborated her companion. "Rid of a wife who didn't want to stay with him! Pleased as the dog with the tin can off his tail. Shove the whiskey down my way, Mill."

"I should not be surprised," proceeded Lady Martindale, airily, as she obeyed, "if he were to marry again."

"Mistake, that," commented the sporting baronet, with a good-humored wink at his wife. Then he laughed at his own wit. "Another tin can? No."

"How silly you are, Phil," said his consort imperturbably. "Come, Ian must have an heir, you know. What? 'Tisn't as if James were likely to marry."

"Father Jim marry?"

"He can't. Isn't that what I say?" she screamed. "So Ian must—he *must* have an heir."

"Oh well." The man lifted the small Perrier from the stand before him and tossed it bubbling into his glass. "Ian had better look out for an heiress first. Some pretty American. Why didn't he go to America? That's where they grow them. I say, Mill, ring, will you—nuisance . . . this bottle's corked!"

It was four days after this memorable morning that Lady Martindale had been brought to Connaught Place by her cousin, Victoria Trent. With characteristic impulsiveness, she made up her mind then and there. She went straight home, and wrote to her brother:

DARLING IAN,

I have found what you want—so, so charming! And everything else quite, quite all right. Keep yourself free till you hear from me again.

CHAPTER IV

NOW, dearie," said Mrs. Duvenant, coming into her daughter's bedroom. "I want my little girlie to look her best today. You know I am expecting Lady Martindale to lunch," she added explanatorily. "And she's quite inclined to take you up."

Oenone turned her graceful head. She had been contemplating her own reflection in the mirror, while Gracieuse, the French maid, recurled two or three tendrils. Mrs. Duvenant's only child was quite accustomed to hear her appearance discussed from the purely business point of view of social advancement.

"Gracieuse thought I needn't be recoiffée, Mamma," she began doubtfully. But her mother interrupted, fulminating the unzealous maid with a glance:

"Certainly, Mademoiselle must have her hair done again!" She paused, surveying the pretty face critically. "No," she went on, "no!" Her tone was irritable. "I don't like that new way of plastering the hair down over the ears. It doesn't suit you. It doesn't suit anybody. Divide Mademoiselle's hair! Lift it in little wings each side, and fasten it up in a Greek knot, a knot of curls—do your hear, Gracieuse? Turn round, Nonny." She issued her orders like a general. Bearing down the sullen frown of the maid and the "But, Mammie, everybody does," of Oenone, "I don't care, my dear," she insisted. "You can afford to take a line of your own."

In another moment she had pushed the abigail on one

side, and was busy herself among the shining chestnut curls.

"If you can't do a simple coiffure like that, Gracieuse, I shall have to get someone else for Mademoiselle."

Oenone Duvenant had bright-hued, crisp hair falling into natural waves and curls. When, after a moment or two, the girl beheld the result of her mother's manipulation, she greeted her reflection in the glass with a smile.

Mrs. Duvenant had judged unerringly. Nothing could be more becoming. The parted waves uplifted and the classic knot gave a nymph-like air of distinction to the small piquante face, and full value to the slender throat. When Oenone smiled, she had a deep dimple at one corner of her curling mutinous lips, and her bright, audacious eyes widened archly.

The mother's expression softened. Her glances caressed the daughter reflectively. And then the further pronouncement was issued:

"We must not have anything too elaborate for luncheon, and it's not such a very warm day. I'll have the Havana *voile-de-soie—la petite robe de chez Doeuillet*, Gracieuse—and just your string of pearls, dearie, and not another jewel. I'll send up a rose to slip into your belt. When you're dressed you can come to my bedroom. Goodness, nearly a quarter to one!"

But Oenone was not passed until a pair of Havana suede cothurns had been substituted for the bronze Cromwell shoes that clothed the slender feet. "Orange silk stockings," ordered Mrs. Duvenant. And then, instead of the great pink rose she had laid aside for her daughter, she substituted a couple of purple tiger-spotted orchids

which she pulled out of a silver bowl in the drawing-room. She stepped back, and contemplated the result, and smiled to herself.

"There's just Miss Vandeleur's cousin, Captain Warrington," she stated, "and Mr. Ogilbie-Grant from the American Embassy. And I believe Lady Martindale said something about bringing her brother."

Oenone, sitting in one of the Gobelin armchairs, her slim legs stretched straight out that she might the better take in the effect of the new-fashion shoes, looked up quickly at her mother, arched her eyebrows and laughed.

"He's a very interesting man, Nonny," went on Mrs. Duvenant rebukingly. "And he's called the Master of Stronaven. Such a pretty old title! He will be Lord Stronaven one day, a Highland Chieftain. It's all very romantic and interesting."

"Well, I don't mind," said the girl idly. She moved one of her slim feet sideways. "Aren't they lambs?" she said.

Mr. Duvenant hesitated. An anxious frown drew her delicate eyebrows together. Oenone was certainly very detached. . . . And she had already picked up all kinds of slipshod expressions from those Monte Carlo girls last winter. But Matilda Vandeleur had said only the other day: "Oh, I do wish she had more of a Spanish accent! You have, you know. That's the charm of being out of the common. Why, there's Lady Charles Durward. She was Sadie Holz, you know—such a success and sure to be Duchess of Flamborough some day. Luxington can't marry. My dear Mrs. Duvenant, she didn't take a bit at first, spoke like a high-school girl—her mother had had the

idiocy to send her to Newnham—till I made her buy a copy of Tom Sawyer and study it. . . ."

Mrs. Duvenant ejaculated helplessly: "Tom Sawyer!" But, before the visions of the Flamborough glories, doubt and expostulation had died on her lips. She now forbore to correct Oenone.

"You'll sit on the other side of the Master of Stronaven," she was proceeding elaborately, when the girl interrupted, asking on the top of a little yawn:

"What am I to call him? I can't say all that."

"I believe you call him 'Master,' answered the mother. It sounded elegant in its originality, she thought. But the younger generation remained unimpressed.

"I'll call no man Master," Oenone said pertly. "Oh, well, there—don't look so cross, Mammy, I'm only joking! And, anyhow, people in England don't repeat other people's names all the time. I heard old Tilly making fun of Lady Champers the other day with her 'How do you do, Miss Vandeleur.' 'How do you do, Mr. Ogilbie.' May I have a marron glacé? Just one, I'm so hungry!"

"Oh, Nonny," said Mrs. Duvenant, "you'll make your fingers all sticky—no, Oenone, I can't have it!"

The hall-door bell thrilled faintly up to their ears. And Mrs. Duvenant colored with annoyance as her spoilt child, disregarding the injunction, ran across the room giggling, towards the silver casket of French bonbons.

"Lady Martindale—The Master of Stronaven," announced the pompous butler.

Millicent Martindale entered, more golden-haired, it seemed, more blue of eye, pink of cheek, of louder voice than ever; her iridescent winged hat slipping on one side

as usual; her gentian-blue voile gown, looped and twisted according to the most recent dictates of fashion, yet somehow hopelessly British in appearance and "noisy" against the delicate extravagance of her hostess' Parisian attire.

Oenone, wheeling round, stood munching an immense marron glacé, in mischievous enjoyment of her own predicament, unable to utter a word. The man who followed Lady Martindale's exuberant entrance halted for a scarcely perceptible moment before shaking hands; his glance, sweeping past the mother, sought and encompassed the daughter in one lightning flash. The girl felt herself as if enveloped by that swift, appraising look.

"He's just snapshotted me," she said to herself, as, gulping down the forbidden morsel with a grimace which she took no pains to conceal, well knowing that nothing she ever did could be ugly, she came forward, ostentatiously wiping her finger-tips with her diminutive scented handkerchief.

Lady Martindale pounced on her; caught her, held her; kissed her in her offhand way, as if the caress were only accidental. Then overpowering her hostess' courteous voice:

"Now I must introduce my brother. Ian, this is Miss Oenone."

"How do you do," said Miss Duvenant. She slipped an indifferent hand into the brown clasp, which held it and dropped it almost fiercely.

She regarded him with an open curiosity, bold, yet innocent. What she saw impressed her in spite of herself. And Oenone Duvenant was not easily impressed. Romantic, her mother had said. She supposed he was romantic.

And elegant. But it was more than that. The clean-cut face, bronzed almost to copper-hue, with the pointed dark beard and the fine aquiline features, looked fierce, she thought. Certainly the eyes which had enveloped her had been fierce, and oddly light and bright in the dark visage. Now they were half-closed and the glances that fell from them were indifferent, almost contemptuous—or so she fancied. "He's like a leopard or something, going to spring," she said to herself. How wrong and over-smart Captain Warrington looked beside him—how insignificant —yet he was tall, and passed for handsome.

As, at the luncheon table, she drew in her chair beside the Master, she opened the conversation with the perfect ease of manner of one who had practically made her début in society at four years old.

"You're not a bit like Lady Martindale."

He turned that indifferent, contracted glance upon her, and gave her a fugitive smile. The self-evident proposition apparently required no reply.

"You've just come back from shooting lions and tigers, haven't you?"

"Lions," he admitted.

"It must be very interesting," said Miss Duvenant.

"Well, you can't think of anything else, at any rate, whilst you're at it."

"Oh."

There fell a little pause between them. All the vividness of Oenone Duvenant's young existence was centered in her bright intelligence. She felt through those quick wits of hers as if that silence of his pulsated with some

hidden intensity. His glance had dropped away from her.

"Do you like salted almonds?" she said coaxingly. He gave a sudden, short laugh and took an almond out of the dish she was holding out to him. "One must be pretty lively when a lion's coming at one, I suppose," she went on.

"Yes," he answered, "quick in deciding, and quick in doing."

With the intuition of her sex, she found a significance in these words which had nothing to do with lions. She looked up, smiling at the dark keen face, arching her eyebrows and dimpling with a coquetry that was at once detached and audacious.

"It's a far cry," he said abruptly, "from lions to Persian kittens."

"Good gracious—what can you mean?"

He laughed, but even as he did so abstraction fell about him. His eyelids drooped. He gazed at her as if she had become suddenly remote, and then turned to the mother:

"That is a very fine Goya on that left panel," he began, with a lift of his eyebrows towards the picture facing him, and from that moment addressed no further word to the daughter.

Lady Martindale could hardly wait until the footman had closed the door of the car upon herself and the Master, before she began her eager questioning.

"Well, dear boy, what do you think of her? Isn't she pretty? And smart, and graceful? What? I didn't say a word too much, did I? You needn't waste your time running about now, need you? Oh, Ian, do be quick; tell me what you think of her!"

"Look here, Millicent, I want to be put down at the Club. Tell him the Travelers', will you. What is it you want to know? About the girl? Oh, yes, of course, she's pretty. There can't be two opinions about that."

The phrase was satisfactory enough. But the tone! Had he said she was hideous, even repulsive, its vindictiveness would have been appropriate. But the unexacting Millicent smiled broadly:

"And there's no doubt about money, either. Did you ever see such a quantity of beautiful things! And the pearls, and the luncheon—What?"

"Oh, the luncheon—" said the Master. He was clasping and unclasping the handle of his walking stick, and broke off the soundless whistling of "Highland Laddie" to answer her. "Do you know what Miss Duvenant had for luncheon? One prawn, a spoonful of chicken curry, a slab of *foie gras*, and two helpings of ice cream."

His sister stared at him uncertainly, and then gave a crow of laughter:

"Well, you must have been watching her! What? Now, dear boy, don't tease me. Do say what you think. Tell me exactly what impression she's made on you."

He reflected a moment. His eyes half-closed. Then he said deliberately:

"A Tanagra statuette, with the soul of a French doll."

Lady Martindale's face fell. She could not in the least understand what he meant, except that it was discouraging.

"Oh, well," she said, after a pause, her lip drooping like that of an offended baby, "I did not expect you to make up your mind at once. Of course, I'm not such a fool!"

"But I have."

"Have what? Have what, dear boy?"

"I have made up my mind."

The car had stopped; he was out of it before the footman had time to jump down. He put his dark face in at the window and said, dropping his words incisively, a fixed smile on his lips as he spoke:

"I have made up my mind to marry Miss—what's her name?—that girl."

"Oh, Ian!" screamed his sister. "Ian—what!—Ian, dear, dear boy!"

But he was already leaping up the steps of the Club; the door swung behind him.

"Oh, dear," said Lady Martindale, "men are odd! Well," to the approaching footman: "Monmouth House."

CHAPTER V

THERE lie but a few hundred yards between the Club and Monmouth House. But the car got into a block and Lady Martindale had some leisure to collect her scattered thoughts, to review the events of the day and arrange a plan of action. That is to say, she did all these things as far as her disconnected mental processes would allow.

"Well"—so the jumbled reflections ran—"It's been a success, I must say. Who would have thought Ian would rush into it like this! 'I mean to marry that girl. . . .' Good gracious, I'm sure I don't even know whether Mrs. Duvenant would have him. She'll look for the highest

bidder. She's that sort. Yes, I'm sure she'll go for the highest bidder." The thought was like a pin-prick in Lady Martindale's brain, and she revolved round it in discomfort, while the car throbbed impatiently between a builder's truck and a laundry van.

Now that she came to think it over, Mrs. Duvenant had been rather grand. Millicent pondered on one or two phrases which had dropped from the rich lady's lips: "Oh, dear no, Lady Martindale. I am not in a hurry to marry my little girl. She's only a child. Yes, indeed, you are quite right, one cannot be too particular. Mr. Duvenant and myself will be very hard to please, I'm afraid."

Mr. Duvenant! Would he have also to be reckoned with—except in the matter of settlement? Well, there was no mistake about the money, that was one good thing. That nice man, Mr. Ogilbie-Grant, from the American Embassy, had said something about the next Vanderbilt. . . . Yes, the whole place had radiated money. The house, the lunch, the flowers, the servants. . . . It was a disquieting fact that Mrs. Duvenant had given no sign of eagerness to further the acquaintance with Ian. And yet she must have seen, she must have understood. . . . Yes, of course, she understood.

Lady Martindale was uneasily conscious of having been perhaps overzealous. "I might have done better to leave the subject of marriage alone," she thought. "Of course I know I'm not a diplomatist. Mrs. Duvenant certainly was stand off."

And there was Tilly Vandeleur veering round and sending her cards for everything that was worth going to—so tiresome! Tilly wouldn't want to be cut out; probably,

anyhow, wouldn't want the heiress to marry at all this season. And then, of course, there was always the question of the divorce. Perhaps Mrs. Stuyvesant might object. . . . It would be silly for that kind of person. . . . But one never could tell; people were so queer! . . . Well, since Ian was on for it, one could but try. Instinctively she felt that if it were to be done at all, it must be rushed. The first step was to enlist Rosie Monmouth. . . . If anyone could help here, it was Rosie. But goodness knew in what kind of humor she would find her. . . .

Lady Martindale heaved a noisy sigh. She wondered whether any other woman in London would put herself out like this, just for a brother. But then, she had always adored Ian. And there was the dear old place and the family to consider; and, poor fellow, it would be heavenly to see him happy again! Not that he had not shaken it off wonderfully. Wonderfully! Tremendously taken with Oenone—love at first sight, almost! . . . Oh, dear, Monmouth House already!

"Is the Duchess in, Pattison? Oh, I am glad. I won't keep her a moment. Not a moment."

Lady Martindale rushed through the great hall, up the shallow stairs.

Familiar as she was with these surroundings, she was unusually conscious today of their satisfying character—spacious as a Florentine Palace, it was not so much a sense of wealth as that of the powers of wealth splendidly used, that was felt on every side. That Monmouth House possessed a unique collection of pictures; that the tapestry room was famous all over the world; that Grinley Gibbons had carved the woodwork of the dining-room, while the

ballroom with its Italian plaster-work was without compare; all that as nothing—nothing at least that the millionaire of yesterday could not acquire for himself today. What was inalienable was the atmosphere of the place; not to be attained by any expenditure, this stamp of dignified tradition. So much had come down through the ages that it seemed as if these grandeurs had grown about the great family as its natural appanage.

Left alone for a moment in one of the smaller reception-rooms, the visitor looked round and drew the breath of one inhaling native air. "It's awfully nice to have money and all that," she reflected, "and I'm sure we all want it badly. Even Monmouth's pinched pretty tight at times, I daresay—if all were known. But, there it is, mere money'll never get a room like this! They may try and try and spend and spend, but, just like at Connaught Place, the best they can produce is a kind of museum. What?"

The last word was spoken out loud in response to the butler's respectful murmur:

"Her Grace will see you in her bedroom, my lady, if you'll kindly step upstairs."

She had heard him, of course. Lady Martindale's "what?" had become celebrated—an inveterate habit. As usual she did not wait for the repetition she had demanded but brushed past him up the stairs.

The Duchess of Monmouth was a very beautiful woman, and still looked young as well as beautiful. So admirable indeed was the art applied to her countenance that the naturally vivid bloom of Milly Martindale looked the less natural of the two. There were ten years between the

cousins, to the Duchess' disadvantage; but the casual observer would unhesitatingly have thought her the younger.

"So good of you to see me, you dear! Here I am," cried Millicent, loudly and unnecessarily announcing herself.

"Darling!" sweetly responded the Duchess from the sofa.

The light in the room was subdued, and the visitor unconsciously began to tread softly as she entered. Hung and paneled in the faintest of gray-greens, with a little dim gilding here and there, the Duchess of Monmouth's bedroom always gave an impression of coolness. But today with the green sun-blinds drawn across the three great windows over the terrace, it was like coming into some mermaid haunt from the glare, the noise, the throng of the hot London streets.

"I've just had my massage, darling," went on the dulcet tones. "Sit down here and tell me what brings you so unexpectedly."

"Now she's going to be catty," said Millicent to herself, as she kissed her cousin fervently but with discretion in the region of the golden curls; and then impetuously pulled up a chair.

"So, so nice!" she murmured.

"Dr. Seymour says I must be very quiet after my séance —magnetic massage, you know, darling—and not see anyone. But, of course, that does not apply to you. Pattison was quite right to let you in—quite right."

"Oh, of course, Rosie darling . . . if I'd any idea. . . . Well, fact is. . . . Well, you see, dearest, you're just the one woman in London—just the one woman in London—"

repeated Lady Martindale, while her brain worked feverishly at the problem, how best to approach the capricious great lady.

"Yes, darling?" The Duchess gave a faint sigh, closed her eyes.

"Well, you were always fond of Ian, weren't you?"

The closed eyes opened and a very wide-awake look was shot at the speaker.

"I am fond of Ian——"

"And I'm sure he was always devoted to you, Rosie," said Millicent lamely, veracity struggling with a sense of what was politic. Then, with fresh glibness, she proceeded: "Well, poor fellow, he wants somebody to be kind to him now, since Morna—" She broke off. That name, which slipped out so easily, always brought with it acute discomfort.

The Duchess pressed her lips together and sat up among her sea-green cushions. As she leaned forward, the soft smiling outlines of her face became hard, well-nigh vindictive.

"Have you heard anything about Morna?" Her voice was sharp. Then allowing herself to sink once more into her cushions, she declared in accents of contemptuous indifference: "She'll come back crawling, and he'll forgive her, of course."

"But, Rosie! Oh, goodness gracious! How silly! He's just divorced her. He can't take her back when he's divorced her. Besides, he hates her now. And—anyhow, he wants to marry again."

"He wants to marry again!" The Duchess displayed the utmost astonishment.

"Yes. Yes, yes, Rosie. That's what I've come to you about. And I've found the very wife for him. Such a dear little thing. So pretty! And rich! The Argentine heiress. You would like her. And, Rosie darling——"

"For goodness sake, Millie, stop!"

The Duchess spoke spontaneously, without either the drawl of refined impertinence, or the unnatural sweetness that had characterized her previous remarks. She lifted one hand and shaded her eyes as if from her cousin's broad stare. Then she said:

"So that's what it means."

"What?"

"I knew I was right. He feels it himself. He'd be wax, wax."

"Rosie, dear, I don't know what you're talking about!" cried Lady Martindale on the gust of a great sigh.

"No, darling, of course you don't." The sweetness and the veiled insolence had returned. "Perhaps now you'd better tell me what it is you want me to do."

Even to Millicent's downrightness it did not come altogether easy to explain. But after listening awhile to her blundering sentences, the great lady suddenly broke into a silvery laugh.

"Yes, darling! Yes, poor darling; I quite understand. It's a snob-trap—and the bait, title and all that is a little damaged by the divorce. And you think I——"

"Oh, Rosie, dearest! You could, you know. Please don't think me a horrid bore——"

"You think," pursued the Duchess calmly, "you think that I could make it seem worth while to those people. Well, I don't know—I don't know," she repeated. "Of

course, it would bore me dreadfully. But—I'll see them together, Ian and your find. No," she amended, "I'll see Ian first. Send him round to me today."

Hesitating between relief and doubt, Lady Martindale remarked vaguely: "You are good, darling. You are good, Rosie, dear," and sat, her perplexed stare still searching her cousin's face. "Of course," she added in a diffident manner, "you would not tell Ian. What?"

"Of course not," said the Duchess, but her thoughts were afield. "Look here, Millie," she proceeded. "Didn't you say you'd just left him at the Club. If you wouldn't mind pushing that bell, I'll make my secretary ring him up. Thank you. Good-bye, darling. I'd better see him alone. I daresay he'll come round, at once. Good-bye, darling," she repeated, and added, affectionately: "Bless you," as their cheeks met.

"Bless *you*, dearest," rejoined Lady Martindale, with kindred fervor.

She moved toward the door, but paused as the secretary entered and waited till that pale silhouette of discreet womanhood had departed on her errand.

"If the girl might come with me to your ball, Rosie——" she then suggested humbly. "You needn't ask the mother."

"I rather think," rejoined the Duchess, "that if I do it at all, I'll do it thoroughly. I mean, darling—" Once more suavity overlay her voice and manner—"if I'm satisfied that it's for dear Ian's happiness, poor fellow. God knows I would but too gladly be of help, if I could."

"I haven't the least notion," thought Millicent, as she hoisted herself somewhat dejectedly into the car. "No, I haven't the least notion what Rosie's up to. But I'm sure she meant to be catty. What does she mean? And how on earth could she imagine he'd ever take Morna back? Rosie was certainly odd today."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the message came back that the Master of Stronaven would be round instantly, the Duchess sent for her maid and ordered two or three changes in her room. The sun-blind over the farthest window was to be pulled up halfway. She wished the little table with the bowl of lily-of-the-valley to be placed at the head of her couch; and an armchair at the foot of it, where the shaft of mellow sunshine struck in; the matches and the cigarette box on the table; and, yes, she would have another cushion—the pale pink one from the bed.

When the woman had left her, the Duchess drew an enameled hand-mirror from under the wonderful bit of lemon and silver brocade that was flung over her feet as she lay, and stared intently at her own reflection. She threw into her eyes a gaze of sadness and yearning; essayed next the effect of a faint smile, instantly relinquished in favor of the former sorrowful gravity.

She slipped the counselor under the coverlet once more as footsteps approached from without. That light leaping tread, that was Ian's. "Like a stag upon one of

his own mountains," she said to herself in her poetic way.

As the door opened, she half-lifted herself and turned the prepared gaze upon the visitor. Her first words, however, were a reproach:

"To think of your being in London all these days, and never giving me a sign of life, Oh, Ian!" And without allowing him time for reply: "You don't mind coming to see me up here? I felt I couldn't wait. Milly's just been. She told me all about you." The man stood gazing down at her, his cold hand gripping her warm fingers. "Sit over there in that chair. Let me look at you. Oh, Ian dear——!"

He cast a glance at her, forbidding pity. She broke off, fascinated by the fury, the despair she could read in it. "This for Morna!" she said to herself.

Fate had given Rosalind Monmouth most things, but had denied her the one thing she had always craved for —the power of evoking passion. She had envied Ian's wife—with an inconceivable envy for the love she had been able to inspire. The splendor of that romance of married life had been as a personal insult to her. Now she could have found it in her heart to envy Morna still, as she divined the frenzy which was devouring the soul of the man before her. "*Mais c'est qu'il est ravagé . . . !*" —the Duchess was fond of the *Roman Psychologique*— "And that fool of a Milly babbling of his looking so well!"

He broke in upon her thoughts, his voice grating with a new note, as of torn fibers, which she was quick to distinguish.

"And what has Milly been telling you," he asked

abruptly, beating against his knee the loose gray glove he held in the outrageously sun-burnt hand.

The light fell across his face. "He's as black as an Abyssinian," thought she. "In a past century, how much blood would have had to be shed to quench or feed his vengeance!"

There he sat, immaculately clad, perfectly self-controlled. The man who had successfully sought the relief of the law from an unfaithful wife, who was planning another marriage—an advantageous one. Could anything be more conventional—more banal? And yet— "He's on fire within—he's seething—savage," she said to herself. "Divorce! It would not have punished Morna so much to strangle her, he knows that. That's why he is doing it."

She had a slow smile as she at last answered his question. It was a smile that had something of cruelty in it.

"Milly says you want to marry again."

"She told you that, did she?"

"Yes, I think you're quite right."

A flush mounted through the carefully graduated tints of her face. A flash sprang into her large hazel eyes. "I think you are quite right," she repeated. "Oh, I understand. I think I've always understood you, Ian. It is the right thing to do. The generous, chivalrous thing to do. All that you can still do for Morna—for poor foolish Morna. It sets her so absolutely free."

She was purposely taunting him. Her heart beat with pleasurable excitement to see the tightening of muscle all over his frame, the clenching of lips, the swift pallor under the tan. She knew that he had cast down his eyes that she might not read in them.

But he answered, after a quick indrawn breath, still with composure:

"What I have done, I have done for myself. It is my intention to marry again."

"Indeed, I am very glad. And, as I told Milly, dear Ian, I am ready to help."

"That's kind of you."

"Kind! I wish I could do more. I wish . . . no, words are so stupid! I'll say nothing. Milly tells me there's a girl——"

"Yes—her name's Duvenant, I believe. I met her to-day for the first time."

"Oh, Ian!" She was hardly prepared for anything quite so summary. "She must indeed be attractive," she went on, flounderingly—the rarest experience for her. "I'm sure she's lovely!"

"I'm talking just like Milly," she was angrily saying to herself.

"Attractive?" he repeated—then laughed. "Adorable!"

"The crackling of thorns under a pot," commented the Duchess, biblically, at the sound of that laughter. Pity stirred vaguely in her heart: "Ian! Who used to laugh like a boy!"

"Well, I'll help," she repeated. "I rather think you would hardly bring it off without me—I understand the mother is ambitious. But there shall be no difficulty, if I can remove it, I promise you that. Tell Milly I'll meet them at tea. I'll meet your Duvenants." She nodded at him sweetly. "I'm sure she's a dear little thing," she said and strove to make her voice sound naturally warm and maternal.

"It's very good of you." But he spoke and looked as if he neither knew nor cared what she meant.

"Milly thought it might help matters," said the great lady piqued. She was giving Milly away, but that could not be avoided. There was not much poetic mystery about the situation, anyhow.

He brought his mind back to her with an effort. She thought, oddly, of strong hands leashing in a black hound from some wild hunt.

"Milly thought it might make a difference at least with the mother. For goodness' sake, don't be dense, Ian," she cried with a not unbecoming impatience. "People are silly, you know, and—and snobbish, too."

He was not one who needed much explanation the moment he chose to understand:

"Because I am divorced, you mean?"

"Some benighted people do think that a drawback, you know," she slipped in sarcastically.

"Well, you know best," he fixed her a second; the fire had gone out of his glance. She thought she had never come under eyes that held so much weariness. "Yes, I daresay Milly's right. I shall be grateful to you." Then he added, with something of that charm of manner which once had been so specially his own: "You'll put some grace into it for us. And, anyhow, I don't myself think there'll be much difficulty. But if there is, I'll get over it."

"Thus speaks the mighty hunter!" she laughed. "Why, I daresay you'd rather enjoy a struggle. The zest of the chase! Have a cigarette?" She picked one for herself, and leant forward to hand him the box. "How many lions did you kill, and was it frightfully thrilling?

I do envy you men! I'd love to go and shoot big game. But Monmouth won't let me. It's not that I would like to kill things, but it must be so exciting to feel your own life hanging in the balance—quivering between the snap of a trigger and the spring of a wild beast."

He thrust out his left hand to expose a deep discolored scar on the wrist.

"Do you see that? It runs from the shoulder downwards. It laid me open at one stroke."

"Oh," she bent nearer, a faint wreath of smoke misting about her head. "Oh, Ian—how—how delightful. Did it leap on you? Life or death, in one panting second, wasn't it? What did you feel like?"

He struck the match and lit his cigarette. "Something quite elementary—that I intended to live, and therefore that master lion had to die. That's what it felt like, mentally. Physically—well, he'd got me down, a beast hot out of hell—excuse the word—breathing the fumes of hell, ton's weight on my chest, eyes as large as saucers, wheels of flame—Pheu! Then there was the shot from one of the boys, and the blood all over me! You would have details."

"And you?" she questioned.

"Oh, I? I laughed." He laughed now. "You see I had to live!"

She lay back, closed her eyes, and breathed forth the delicate fumes, absorbed in thought. He drew three whiffs, flung the cigarette from him with nervous gesture, glanced at her broodingly once or twice, and then rose. She made no effort to detain him, only put out her hand to him smiling.

"If you'll come to dine—" she halted for a rapid calculation, "if you'll come to dine this day week, Ian, I'll have Miss Duvenant to meet you—and—you can sit out on the terrace, you know, after dinner."

"Thank you, I'll come." He nodded to her.

The instant the door had closed upon him, the Duchess cast the pink duvet from her feet and sprang from the sofa. She took a turn in the room. Her movements were agitated, almost violent; then she came back to her cushions, and sat down, her chin in her hands. "Why—why!" she said half aloud. Her thoughts circled in question after question. Why had Morna left her husband? Why had that love story which had been so torturing a wonder to herself, come to this hideous end? Must every splendid romance be tragedy, sooner or later? And why, why should she see thus clearly and understand thus intimately, and never have known either the joy, or the sorrow of the great question? She had hated Morna for the insolence of her happiness; hated her with that hatred of envy which is the basest and most relentless fire that ever made ashes of a woman's heart; she hated her still. Morna, betraying, dishonored, repudiated, had yet the power to cause these heights and depths of agony and wrath in the man she had betrayed. Ian's whole being was molten with passion for the lost creature. . . . No one could so pursue vengeance who did not still love. He had wanted to live only to this end. Very well, at least his vengeance should be accomplished!

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Mrs. Duvenant recognized the scrawl on the note that was brought by an express messenger that evening, she glanced at it almost superciliously. Lady Martindale was certainly very pressing, and Mrs. Duvenant was not at all sure that she intended to be pressed.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed irritably, as the butler respectfully intimated that the boy was waiting for a reply. But the next moment her face became irradiated. "Oh, yes," she cried, rising with alacrity. "I'll write, at once." She glanced at the page again.

> Come and meet my cousin, the Duchess of Monmouth, tomorrow at tea. Do—do if you can.

Mrs. Duvenant repeated the delicious words voicelessly. And over page there was a postscript:

> Rosie's ball is on the 20th. She'll have Royalty, of course. I'm sure it would amuse you, dear girl.

"Childie!" called Mrs. Duvenant, when the butler had at length departed carrying off her reply. It had taken a little reflection to convey the right shade of dignified acceptance. "Nonnie dear, come here."

"Must I, Mummie? I'm so comfortable!"

"Nonnie," said the mother, struck by something muffled

in the fresh young voice. "You've gotten hold of those sweets again! You'll ruin your teeth, my dearie!"

A gurgling laugh was the only reply. Mrs. Duvenant could not be severe tonight. She walked across the boudoir to the inner room which was her daughter's sanctum and which, the girl averred, contained the only comfortable furniture in the house. Curled up in the depth of an armchair that certainly seemed to justify her estimate, an open book on her lap, a box of sweets beside the reading lamp, Miss Duvenant was enjoying a quiet hour.

"Lady Martindale wants us to meet the Duchess of Monmouth tomorrow at tea."

"Well, I don't mind," remarked the young lady. She was picking over the sweet box with her agile little fingers as she spoke and did not even look up.

"There, dearie, listen to this!" Mrs. Duvenant read the alluring postscript in tones that trembled with emotion.

The girl glanced up.

"My!" she remarked with perfect placidity. "Royalty! Does that mean George and Mary? Or only the other kind?"

The mother's heart had an accelerated beat of pride. "My Nonnie would grace any position. She's not a bit impressed!"

She herself was impressed to the extent of an almost sleepless night and the morning found her irritable and flustered. "I know I'm looking a perfect show," she said feverishly; demanded her drops; couldn't touch a morsel of breakfast, and spent a couple of hours leaning on her elbow while the two maids produced garment after garment

for her choice in connection with the afternoon's engagement.

It was small wonder that she should have a hectic flush in either cheek, when she stepped at last into the car that was to drive them to Hill Street. She had kept it deliberately waiting ten minutes—it would never do to appear eager—although Oenone's suggestion of a turn round the Park had been met with irascibility.

When, however, an hour later, they drove homewards again, the satisfaction of achievement pervaded Mrs. Duvenant's soul almost to complete bliss. The Duchess had been charming; perfectly charming. They had had a long talk together. They had been, as Mrs. Duvenant phrased it to herself, almost chatty. Oenone had looked captivating! Her frock was quite the right thing: girlish, with a dash of French audacity. And the hat with its one quivering monster scarlet butterfly on the simple twist of filmy lace, suited the piquante face. The mother contemplated the daughter now, with a mist of tender pride in her tired eyes. No wonder the Duchess had admired her, and how delicately, how charmingly had the great lady conveyed her appreciation. Mrs. Duvenant recalled the smiling glance and the soft tone in which she had dropped the one word: "Psyche." How different from poor Lady Martindale and her crude compliments! It was already "poor Lady Martindale!" with Mrs. Duvenant.

Then had ensued that intimate little conversation which lingered so fragrantly in Mrs. Duvenant's memory. The Duchess had talked of her own girl:

"We mothers," she had said, "of only daughters—we need not apologize to each other for our maternal egoism

—my little Edwina is still in the schoolroom. Yes, she is pretty—you are very kind to divine that it is so—but not so pretty as your child. No, it's no use pretending. Still—" Well, Mrs. Duvenant would see for herself some day soon, she hoped. Yes, the Duchess had hoped that Mrs. Duvenant would allow her to call.

"That means, dearie, you'll certainly get the Monmouth House ball."

Mrs. Duvenant put her hand to her head; the nerve headache which had been threatening since morning, was indubitably coming on. Then with the throb of pain, rose the thought of the single shadow on the afternoon's brightness. The Master of Stronaven had not been present. She wondered why. Could she have been mistaken in Lady Martindale's advances yesterday? They had seemed so marked, almost, Mrs. Duvenant had thought them, unduly marked, considering the shortness of the acquaintance. Had she been too evasive, perhaps even repressive in her replies? Had she, perhaps, jeopardized the possibilities of an alliance with so desirable a family? Still, she argued with herself, if Lady Martindale had been offended, she would scarcely have arranged this meeting. The Master's non-appearance remained a mystery, vexing and insolvable.

"Well, Mummie," said Oenone of a sudden, "of course it's very gratifying to get to know a real Duchess—I'm sure those we knew on the Riviera—the foreign ones, I mean—never seemed real. And I'd like to go to Monmouth House. But I don't know why she's asking us, for when she was talking to you, and looking at me across the room, I just thought she could have stuck pins into me."

"Nonnie! I never heard anything so absurd," cried the mother with genuine anger.

"Perhaps," said Oenone, unmoved, pointing the not unpleasing reflection with her deep mischievous dimple, "she was jealous of my hat! I rather think I look nicer than anyone in the room, anyhow, and I expect she felt that."

"I think the Duchess of Monmouth incapable of any such mean feelings," cried Mrs. Duvenant. "I never met a sweeter woman."

"Oh, well, I just thought—" murmured the girl.

The Duchess had outstayed the Duvenants. Past mistress of social tactics she had got up as if to take leave and upon Mrs. Duvenant's rising also had fallen back into her chair, in graceful oblivion of her first intention. She had smiled so pleasantly and seemed so unconscious of any maneuver, that even Mrs. Duvenant, all uneasy susceptibility as she was, had perceived nothing.

"Well, my dear? Well, Rosie?"

The door had hardly closed before Lady Martindale turned full of buoyant questioning.

The Duchess, with the dulcet smile which had sped Mrs. Duvenant, fixed on her lips, gazed back without speaking. If her eyes still held the hard glance which had struck Oenone, Millicent had no perception of it.

"Isn't she quite lovely?" she went on. "Oh, yes, I know you think her so. I heard you tell her mother. What? Psyche! What?"

"Did I say that?" said the Duchess slowly. "Psyche means 'soul,' doesn't it? I can't imagine anything more

—my little Edwina is still in the schoolroom. Yes, she is pretty—you are very kind to divine that it is so—but not so pretty as your child. No, it's no use pretending. Still—" Well, Mrs. Duvenant would see for herself some day soon, she hoped. Yes, the Duchess had hoped that Mrs. Duvenant would allow her to call.

"That means, dearie, you'll certainly get the Monmouth House ball."

Mrs. Duvenant put her hand to her head; the nerve headache which had been threatening since morning, was indubitably coming on. Then with the throb of pain, rose the thought of the single shadow on the afternoon's brightness. The Master of Stronaven had not been present. She wondered why. Could she have been mistaken in Lady Martindale's advances yesterday? They had seemed so marked, almost, Mrs. Duvenant had thought them, unduly marked, considering the shortness of the acquaintance. Had she been too evasive, perhaps even repressive in her replies? Had she, perhaps, jeopardized the possibilities of an alliance with so desirable a family? Still, she argued with herself, if Lady Martindale had been offended, she would scarcely have arranged this meeting. The Master's non-appearance remained a mystery, vexing and insolvable.

"Well, Mummie," said Oenone of a sudden, "of course it's very gratifying to get to know a real Duchess—I'm sure those we knew on the Riviera—the foreign one I mean—never seemed real. And I'd like to go to Monmouth House. But I don't know why she's when she was talking to you, and look room, I just thought she could ha

inappropriate. I think she'll do very well. Very well, indeed. Just what is wanted."

The smile broadened and then vanished. It was a play of features that conveyed the impression of amiability struggling against much weariness of spirit. Bazaars knew that smile—and the guests of the Annual Garden Party.

"By the way, where is Ian?"

Millicent laughed and reddened.

"I didn't ask him, you see. Oh, well—well, you know, Rosie; never does to thrust things too much down people's throats, what?"

The Duchess stared. This flash of worldly wisdom in her cousin was so unexpected.

"Quite right—*Il faut tenir la dragée haute*—" she commented drawling. And then impatiently: "Oh, don't say 'What?' You know French quite well. And if you don't you ought to. But for all that, you will have to stuff the thing down their throats—if you are to do it at all."

The forbidden interjection leaped out irresistibly. "What?" Consternation spread over Millicent's face. "Do you think Mrs. Duvenant——"

"I mean Ian's throat," said the Duchess, "at least I mean, darling, you'd better take him on the bound, or—" She left Lady Martindale to fill in the alternative.

"Rosie's very uncomfortable," said that genial being to herself, when her cousin had taken her departure. It was a singular thing, that for so sweet a being, this was an impression the Duchess of Monmouth frequently left behind her.

The hour came when Mrs. Duvenant was able to sit

down at the escritoire, and write that oft-composed letter to her intimate friend and bygone rival in Buenos Ayres.

You must forgive my long silence, dearie—the fatigues of the London season are beyond everything you can imagine. And, as you know, dear Zara, my nerves were never able to stand a prolonged strain. However, yesterday we had really what, to use young men's slang, I may call a night off. We dined at Monmouth House—quite *dans l'intimité*. The Duchess of Monmouth is such a sweet woman and so sympathetic. She said she knew I wanted rest and that was why she only made it a family party. There were just the Duke and his cousin—the son of Lord Stronaven, such an elegant, handsome, interesting man! The Duke is most pleasant, though much older than the Duchess. Oenone very much admired. She is going to a dance at Lady Renfrew's tonight. And next week the great event in London Society is the ball at Monmouth House. Lady Martindale, the Monmouth's cousin—she's a sister, by the way, of the Master of Stronaven—Isn't it a pretty old title?—has asked us to join her dinner for it first.

The Duchess said so charmingly, that she was quite jealous, because she wanted to have us herself. But she had sent in her list for it already; the King and Queen are to be there. And it seems they have to know who is invited. I am getting a new dress for Oenone. I think Doeuillet suits her better than anybody almost. We mean to run over to Paris just for a couple of days to try on. Doeuillet's sent me a sketch

which is really quite perfect—white, as fine as cobweb, with a film of diamanté. I am getting her a diamond comet for her hair—nothing heavy, of course, one of Cartier's most delicate trifles. It tempted me last time I was over; but was afraid Mr. Duvenant might think I'd been a little bit extravagant as it was—after the pearls! The man said: A fairy flame in Mademoiselle's hair—*légère, légère*—no one will know what it is, but that there is a light. Otherwise, of course, diamonds for a girl.

Mrs. Duvenant concluded her letter with a phrase that she had been trying to keep out of it all through, but which seemed to force its way on to the page in spite of prudence:

Somehow I'm afraid I shan't be allowed to keep my Nonnie very long! But I must not think of myself.

CHAPTER VIII

"WELL," said the Duchess. It was the night of her little impromptu dinner; the guests had departed and she was alone with her cousin—"Well, Ian—you didn't go out on the terrace after all?"

She had drawn him into her own little library. One of the facets of her jewel personality she most liked to flash upon the world was that of an eclectic literary taste. She knocked off the ash of the inevitable cigarette as she spoke, and gave him that wide jocund smile which, now and again, had its hint of cruelty.

"Too soon," answered he.

"Too soon? I thought you could hardly restrain your ardor."

"That's just it——"

"Oh," she mocked. "Are you afraid she won't have you?"

"Thought, perhaps, I'd better wait till I had met her four times."

"Well, let it be at my ball, anyhow; and I'll see that Mummie—isn't that what she calls her?—is ready to bless you."

"Thank you, Rosie. What an angel of comfort you are."

So they sat, gibing at each other across the dark gulf of his thoughts. Presently he sprang to his feet without warning.

"Well, good night, and thank you again."

She held his hand and looked closely at him.

"Ian—are you sure? . . . " But he gave her no time to finish her speech, which was clothed in accents deliberately different from the previous hard lightness.

"Sure?" he echoed. "Who is sure? But if you mean determined, why yes."

The door closed heavily upon him. She remained pensive.

"Oh, that look in his eyes!" she was thinking. "As of a soul in hell! Every time I see him, it is as if he had fallen into a yet deeper circle. . . ." She revolved the thought with that singular relish of strong emotion which was her secret passion. "And this is only their third meeting! How will it be when they are married? . . .

The mating of a humming bird and a tiger would be more congruous."

Ian was always associated in her mind with some such savage image, relentless, untamed. The smile came back to her lips; not the celebrated charity smile, but the smile of the woman who had found some real enjoyment at last.

She had not been in the best of humors this evening. The spectacle of Oenone's audacious prettiness, her vivid youth, her cool indifference had not been agreeable to her. Indeed, the Duchess of Monmouth had thought Miss Duvenant's indifference almost impertinent—"Cheek," the Duchess said to herself. Moreover, her own saturnine, self-absorbed Duke had turned looks of interest and pleasure upon the chit! Men were fools! . . . She had asked herself what she was doing in the business. It was no part of her scheme of life to play the sentimental idiot. She had felt half-inclined to withdraw her help, and beat down the whole scheme with three careless words to Mrs. Duvenant, as a child weary of the trouble knocks down a house of cards.

But that minute's conversation with Ian alone, above all the look in his eyes, had sufficed to bring her back energetically to her first resolve. The tiger should have his humming bird. And if the humming bird came to grief, well—the Duchess shrugged her shoulders and laughed to herself—no one could hold her responsible.

Of course, so poetic and charming a being as Rosalind Monmouth did not crudely admit to herself that the thought of Oenone, with the brightness and insolent serenity crushed out of her was not without its charm. She no more admitted this instinct of feminine malice than she

acknowledged the corrosive envy of another woman's power, which was the mainspring of her present action. She did not say: because the love between them was unique and splendid and I know nothing can ever really kill it, I will to build the last barrier between Ian and Morna.

What she said to herself was: Miss Duvenant is a dear little thing, and, of course, he is sure to be quite fond of her, after a while. It would be too dreadful if that horrible wanton Morna, who has broken his life, were ever to draw him into the outrageous folly of forgiving her. . . .

"Well, your girl does look sweet!" said Lady Martindale.

It was about the fifth time she had said it. She had drawn Mrs. Duvenant on the sofa beside her, apart from the rest of her guests. It was the evening of the Monmouth House Ball. Millicent was excited even beyond her usual impetuosity.

"I'm sure I'm very glad to hear you say so, Lady Martindale," had responded Mrs. Duvenant, with the same inflection of mixed dignity and affability on each successive occasion.

Then Lady Martindale suddenly plunged.

"I thought they made such a handsome pair, didn't you? My brother's so dark and strong, you know, and she's so ethereal. Just as it ought to be. What? Contrast, you know."

Mrs. Duvenant drew herself up; Lady Martindale was trotting in on sacred ground with the equine action best described as "dishing." Pride woke fiercely in her breast —how coarse to speak in that manner, and in such a loud

voice, too! Did Lady Martindale think that Oenone Duvenant was to be taken for granted? Did she imagine, because the Duvenants were strangers, that the ordinary amenities of society were to be ignored in dealing with the most intimate and delicate matters?

"I don't in the least know what you mean, Lady Martindale," she said, her voice quivering.

Lady Martindale stared.

"Oh, well," she exclaimed with unabated cheerfulness, "there doesn't seem to be much secret about it now! What? My goodness, the way those two went on!"

"I don't know what you mean, Lady Martindale," repeated Mrs. Duvenant. "I saw nothing in my daughter's conduct to call forth any such comment."

"Oh, dear—how silly! I mean, of course—it's just my way—of course, I only meant Ian. Ian. What? No mistake about him! Why, he devoured her with his eyes."

"Really, Lady Martindale—" Mrs. Duvenant's tiara was visibly vibrating, and the enormous Cartier pendant flashed light and color with every panting breath. "I trust the Master of Stronaven is too much of a gentleman to make my daughter conspicuous!"

"Oh, dear!" ejaculated the disconcerted matchmaker. "Of course I didn't mean anything like that. Conspicuous? Not in that way, you know. Ian wouldn't. Ian doesn't. However, Ian admires her, it's all in the most——"

She broke off. The silly woman, she thought, had nearly driven her to the absurdity of assuring her that her brother's intentions were honorable. How tiresome and touchy parvenus were! One never knew where to have them.

Mrs. Duvenant rose.

"I don't think there's much use in discussing the matter any more, Lady Martindale," she said with acidity. And, moving with great stateliness across the room, called her daughter sharply.

"Why, Mummie," cried the girl, as a little later, they found themselves together in their car, whirling toward St. James' Park, "what could make you act so? Nobody does this kind of thing."

"What kind of thing, dearie?" Mrs. Duvenant was already ashamed of her heat and spoke in a small voice.

"Oh, carrying me off, this way. Nobody does it, you know. Lady Martindale meant me to drive with her and her brother."

"Well, Nonnie," said the mother trembling again, "Lady Martindale began to speak so . . . so disrespectfully of you, dearie——"

"Disrespectfully?"

"Disrespectfully, I may say indelicately."

"Oh, Mummie, nonsense!"

"Yes, my dear. I hardly like to repeat what she said, childie, but she spoke of her brother devouring you with his eyes——"

"Well, so he does, Mummie."

"And about—Oh Nonnie, and about your going on, both of you at dinner."

"Well, so we did, I expect. My goodness—" Oenone leant back and laughed. "Why, mother, when I tried to speak to the poor young man on the other side of me—well, the Master looked like strangling him."

Waves of conflicting emotions coursed through the mother's frame. She had been outraged in her most sensitive feelings. And yet here was her Nonnie laughing and pleased; ready herself to make a joke of it all!

"Well, I suppose I'm very old-fashioned," she said apologetically. And then a sob rose in her throat. "Oh, Nonnie," cried she, "it all seems so quick and strange! I was afraid——"

"Oh, well," said the girl, her pretty, airy voice untouched by the least emotion, except perhaps amusement, "don't you worry, Mummie, it's just as well not to let them think I'm ready to drop into their mouths. Did you see how the Master looked when you whisked me off from under his nose? Yes, I rather believe it will be quick."

"Oh, dearie!"

"Of course I saw it the very first day, Mummie. He just looked at me and—" she clicked her fingers, "it was done—like a snapshot, I said it to myself."

"But you, Nonnie, you?" Mrs. Duvenant coughed nervously. A brilliant alliance was one thing, the proper crowning of her social efforts; it was right that as a mother she should consider the worldly point of view; but it was quite another thing to hear such sentiments from these girlish lips.

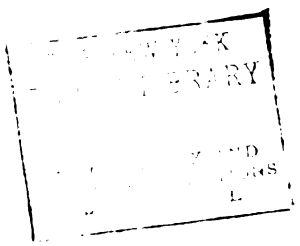
"Well, Mummie, what about me? Mercy! Here we are in the queue!"

The fairy comet gleamed through her curls as she bent forward to look round the vast courtyard into which they were slowly penetrating.

"Oh, Nonnie darling, if the Master of Stronaven—if he



"'Behold, Mummie, the future Lady Stronaven.'"



were to say—anything very special tonight! . . . . Oh, my wee lamb, have you thought—have you?"

Oenone cast a frankly humorous glance at her mother.

"You mean, if he proposes? Why, if he does, Mummie, I don't think I could say 'No'—I think he's just fascinating. Highlanders are simply too romantic. Isn't it funny?" She burst out laughing. "I told you I thought he'd have liked to murder the young man beside me. And do you know, I believe those two Buchanan-Stewart girls could have scratched my eyes out, after dinner, they were so jealous! I am sure Lady Diana's in love with him. They're kind of cousins, you know."

"Oh, Nonnie—dear, this is no laughing matter! You can't enter upon the most serious step in life——"

Oenone fell back into her place.

"Then what is it you want me to do, Mummie dear?" she asked rather impatiently. "Didn't you intend me to have him? Perhaps—" her light voice took an edge of sarcasm, "perhaps you'd rather I said 'No' because I don't feel just pious about it. It's all very well," went on the girl, "to read about deep souls and sacred duties, and the home and all that. But you never were that kind yourself, Mummie. I don't see why I should be. I want to have a good time and I'd as lief be Lady Stronaven, some day, as anything else. And I'd like to have a splendid old castle, with pipers and stags, and give big parties for the shoots. And I'd like to have a fine mansion in London, and receive royalty and cut out the Duchess. I'm not so fond of her as you are!"

Mrs. Duvenant was distracted between admiration and dismay.

"Oh, dearie, Oh, childie! . . . " she gasped. "But if there isn't any love in your heart!"

"Love?" Oenone laughed. "Oh, that'll be on his side. I don't mind his being mad about me. I think that's quite thrilling."

If Mrs. Duvenant had been at home, she indubitably would have had an attack of nerves, and retired to bed, there to receive the administration of drops, smelling salts and hot bottles. But being about to attend the most important function in London, she had to gulp back the lump in her throat, to force a smile, and step as briskly as she might out of the car in the wake of her daughter's nimbly moving figure.

It was only after the departure of the royal guests that the Duchess was able to give her cousin Millicent the moment's private conversation which the latter had demanded, in an agitated whisper, early in the evening.

"Oh, Rosie, dear, do, do help! I'm so, so miserable! I'm afraid Mrs. Duvenant is going to be horrid about Ian. Poor boy, and he so gone, it would be too dreadful!"

"Why, what's happened?" cried her Grace, not very agreeably. "What does the Duvenant woman want? We've made too much of her, I expect!"

"Oh, dearest, don't turn away! If you won't help me, I really can't face it. If Ian should be refused—Oh, he'll think it all my fault!" Lady Martindale, her massive tiara askew, looked as if she were going to cry. "Mrs. Duvenant quite gave me to understand tonight that she was not thinking of Ian for the girl—wouldn't let me speak of it, even."

"Well, darling, why did you speak of it? Wasn't that rather a pity?"

The Duchess' air was weary. "Have you any idea," she went on, "where the creature is? I'll have a word with her. Silly thing, it's quite likely she expected me to bring her up to the Queen—yes, I'll say a word to her."

Mrs. Duvenant was sitting, alone and disconsolate, when the Duchess glided gracefully into the place beside her and, with the suavity of which she had the secret, addressed her:

"I'm glad to sit down for a moment. Yes, it is very fatiguing having our King and Queen to a big function. I never can enjoy them a bit. It's different at our little intimate meetings! They are rather dears, you know—I do hope you've been looked after, Mrs. Duvenant, and that your charming girl is having a good time. Yes, there'll be more spirit in the room now—there is always a little hanging back, so long as the Queen is dancing. Is that Diana Buchanan? Ian was looking for her. She was dining with Milly, too, wasn't she? Such a pretty girl—we are all devoted to her. Poor Ian, it is so delightful to see him taking up his life again and enjoying himself after his trouble. Have you had supper? Oh, but you must! Here is Sir Aubrey Bowater—Sir Aubrey, I'm sure you know Mrs. Duvenant? Will you bring her in to supper?"

There was no doubt that the Duchess, with a few careless words, had achieved the effect she desired to produce. The harassed Mrs. Duvenant, seized with terrible misgivings, could scarcely respond intelligently to the urbane observations of the elderly politician whose arm she had mechanically taken.

But after all, diplomacy was not needed; both managing sister and anxious mother might have been spared their bad quarters of an hour. Oenone, her little head thrown back, pride shining from her eyes, an unwonted crimson warming her cheek; Oenone in the fantastic draperies that clung to her slender limbs, stepping gaily beside the Master of Stronaven, had already promised to be his wife.

Mother and daughter drove home in unwonted silence; Oenone humming to herself the lilt of the final two-step, seemed lost in her own thoughts. And Mrs. Duvenant, oppressed by guilty anxiety, dared not ask any questions which might reveal the mischief she feared to have brought about.

Certainly the Master of Stronaven had been a good deal with Lady Diana; and though the mother assured herself that the young lady could not hold a candle to Oenone, she nevertheless unwillingly characterized her as an elegant girl. She had believed that, premature as it might seem, the Master would have spoken tonight. But this had clearly not happened. She had not even seen him particularly in attendance upon Oenone.

Could Lady Martindale have dropped a word of warning to her brother? Could they both be seriously offended? Lady Martindale had markedly avoided her the whole evening. The Duchess had certainly, with a few careless phrases, put her miles away. She had said "Good-bye" as if she hardly remembered their identity.

"Have you enjoyed yourself, dearie?" she ventured at last, in a small voice.

"Oh, quite awfully, Mummie." Oenone interrupted her rhythmic humming to cast these words carelessly, then resumed the litle chant with its merry swing.

"She's not a bit like herself," thought Mrs. Duvenant. And the unnatural silence continued till they reached the threshold of the mother's bedroom. Then Oenone said:

"I'll just pop back, in my dressing-gown, when you've got rid of Elise."

"Oh, dear, what shall I say to the child?" thought the poor woman to herself.

She dismissed the maid and sat down before her dressing-table, propping her brow on her hand without even the energy to unpin her tiara.

Oenone skipped into the room presently, her scarlet embroidered kimono hardly drawn together across the slender figure in its diaphanous undergarments. She sketched two or three dancing steps as she approached her mother, then stopped and made a little curtsey:

"Behold, Mummie, the future Lady Stronaven—pity I can't start straight away!" She broke off as her mother burst into tears. "What's the matter? Don't say now you haven't wanted it!"

"My own childie . . . ?" sobbed Mrs. Duvenant. "I'm too happy! . . . I thought . . . I thought I had spoiled it all!"

She opened her arms to her daughter, and the girl kissed her very prettily, but manifested no desire to remain enfolded in the maternal embrace.

"There, Mummie, there . . . ! Oh, goodness! You'll have such a headache. I can't imagine what you're crying for. It's splendid, I think. He's coming to see you

tomorrow. He'll turn up about twelve. He's just mad about me." She laughed with abstracted eyes.

Mrs. Duvenant rose to procure for herself a handkerchief more commensurate to the occasion than the cobweb piece of lace that accompanied her evening toilet. Then she unburdened herself of her tiara, and, kicking off her high-heeled shoes, slipped her feet into the quilted pink mules which stood waiting beside her dressing-gown.

"Shall I unhook you, Mummie?"

"No, dearie, not yet, I can't think of anything but—Oh, Nonnie, I must keep looking at your sweet face, my bonnie dearie. What did he say? How did he do it?"

"Well, I don't know that girls ought to tell that kind of thing."

"Not to your own mother, Nonnie?"

"Well, there ain't much to tell, and that's the truth," Oenone laughed again. "I declare I could hardly say how it happened. Just in two seconds on the terrace, with all the other people about. We had sat out after a waltz, and they had struck up another. He said, 'You're engaged to me,' and I said, 'Not a bit of it, I'm engaged to—' but he wouldn't let me finish. I was going to say Captain Sinclair—that's the young man that sat the other side of me at dinner, you know. 'You're engaged to me,' he said again, 'and I'd marry you tomorrow if I could.' Well, I thought it was pretty cool. But somehow—Oh, Mummie—he does care so dreadfully. His eyes just blazed. He caught my hand and—well, after all I'm not a fool. It really does mean everything you wanted for me and everything I always wanted for myself. It was a queer proposal, wasn't it? Of course, it would have been

rather fun to keep him dangling on a bit. But he kind of swept me off my feet." She yawned suddenly. "Oh, do let me unhook you, I must go to bed."

"I'll ring for Elise presently," said Mrs. Duvenant. "Nonnie——"

The tears were rising in her voice again; the girl took fright at the thought of a fresh scene of tenderness.

"I'm off," she said lightly; dropped a fugitive kiss on her mother's cheek and hurriedly departed.

Mrs. Duvenant put her hand dizzily to her head.

Sir Theophilus Martindale and his brother-in-law ran against each other in the hall of Monmouth House, both bent on immediate departure.

"I say, old man," said Sir Theophilus, "Mill is just off, I said I'd walk. You come round and have a quiet cigar with me."

"Right," responded the other.

The walk of the Highlander, his clean tread and rhythmic springing step as if to the swing of the kilt, was in singular contrast to the slouching gait of his companion. As great a contrast lay in the appearance of the two men: Ian MacIvor, lean, finely built, with sharp-cut dark visage —a figure so well proportioned as scarcely to seem its height—broad-shouldered, thin-flanked; and the burly sportsman, with red face thrust forward, heavy shoulders rounded as if weighted with his own bulk. The difference went deeper yet. Their minds were as widely apart.

Usually the Master of Stronaven avoided his sister's good-natured husband; and Sir Theophilus was proportionately gratified at the acceptance of his invitation. He

felt the more aggrieved therefore, that as they sauntered up St. James' Street, all in the blue summer's dawn, each cheery remark of his should fall, scarcely heeded, on his companion's ears. By the time they reached Berkeley Square, the baronet was wrapped in the dignity of injured silence, and "Curse the fellow!" thought Sir Theophilus as he halted before his own front door and sought for his latchkey with thick fingers, "I don't believe he as much as knows whether I'm speaking or not!"

Once within the walls of his sanctum, however, a sense of the obligations of hospitality drove him to fresh efforts. But, though he provided his relative with "the best cigar in the kingdom, my boy," and "a drop of the curious old wheat whiskey, not to be drunk every day, you know" —the Master of Stronaven remained in an almost impenetrable abstraction.

Lying back in the huge red leather chair, his legs crossed, swinging his foot, Ian scarcely tasted these superlative luxuries. Sir Theophilus found them both exceedingly to his taste, especially the liquid, and was presently stimulated to jocularity.

"Regular top-hole beanfeast, wasn't it?"

"Top-hole," assented the Master, uncrossed his legs, recrossed them, and swung the other foot.

The action caught the Baronet's rather blear gaze.

"Saw you skipping about like one o'clock, eh?—'pon honor! You wouldn't get me out in a two-step—no, not for a trifle! Wouldn't suit our old Mill, either, eh? Ripping stuff, this. I say, aren't you going to drink? Oh, Lord," cried Sir Theophilus, addressing space, "if he hasn't taken it at a gulp! Why, I thought you Scotch

fellows knew what's what in tipples. Talking of my old Mill, now—what was I saying? She's not the weight for a two-step!" He suddenly collapsed into the companion armchair, and, waving his cigar, became dictatorial. "Not but what I don't think she cuts as good a figure as any of them. A sight better, I say. I never was one to care for your weedy young women. 'Pon my word, I thought my old girl held her own tonight—jolly well, she did. What if she does go a bit heavy. Where will you see a skin like that—and not a dab of paint, you bet. And her hair! There's color! What wouldn't most of them give to have real gold on the top of their heads like hers? No dyeing, none of your hairdresser's stuff. All her own, aha!" He suddenly broke off, certain wifely confidences arising amid the confusion of his brain. "I'm not saying, mind you, that that isn't a nice little filly you were disporting yourself with, Ian, old man. Eh? What did you say?"

"Ian, old man," had not spoken at all; but flinging his head back, had broken into loud laughter.

"What is it now?" repeated his brother-in-law, touchily.

Ian sprang up, and still laughing, clapped his companion's hulking shoulder.

"Right! Right!" he said.

The other jerked a doubting glance at him.

"You're a queer one! What's right?"

"Your point of view, Phil, your philosophy. That's the way to treat them."

"Treat whom?"

"The women, Phil, the women." The laugh rang out again.

Sir Theophilus puffed at his cigar and stared. He was hanged if he knew what the chap was driving at. He wondered if Ian were a bit touched.

"Your good old-fashioned English sportsman, and a Turk—not so much to choose between them after all—between you, now, Phil, and a fat pasha——"

"Between me and a fat pasha? Well, that's a good 'un!"

"Oh, you're quite right—it's the only way. They haven't any souls. Pick them out for their skin and their hair——"

"Good heavens, man, speak some sense, something a fellow can understand! What are you talking about, that's what I'd like to know. Pick whom? Pick what?"

"Oh, that's according to taste. A neat little filly—or a splendid mare!"

"Oh, horses then——"

"No, wives, Theophilus. Wives!"

Poor Sir Theophilus was more than ever at sea.

"Well, that's a good 'un," he said again feebly. "Wives?"

Then glimmerings of his brother-in-law's meaning breaking upon his bewilderment, he began to laugh in his turn.

"I take you! I take you!" he said waving his cigar. "And it ain't a bad thing either. If more fellows had the sense to pick out a wife as they'd pick out a horse—well, 'pon my soul, there'd be less trouble. And what's more, when they've got them, if they'd treat them with half the sense they do the nags—what I say is," went on Sir Theophilus, his ideas becoming extremely clear to him, though he had a certain difficulty in expressing them—"what I say

is—a little common-sense is all that's wanting. Let them be properly groomed, I say. Have their oats. And give them their heads now and then. Let them romp in a clear field—let them have their bit of season, you see, old chap! Don't ride them on the curb—take them easy on the snaffle, and the friskiest of them will settle down in double harness and go as steady as you please, and as sweet."

"Exactly," said Ian. "You and the Turk, as I said, you and the Turk. That's the way to treat them, like valuable animals."

"Eh?" ejaculated Sir Theophilus. Then an angry light sprang into his bloodshot eyes. "Come, if you think I'm going to sit and hear you insinuate things about Milly and me——"

"Not at all, old man." Ian wheeled round with a flickering smile. "I'm talking about myself and the neat little filly. Good morning, Theophilus, your remarks have been most illuminating. I quite concur. But the Turks carry it rather further than we do. I'm afraid it's not practical in England."

Sir Theophilus stared after the retreating figure.

"Well," he ejaculated. "I'm—I'm—" he sought in his brain for something strong enough to express his sense of disapprobation and amazement, but could find nothing better than "I'm blowed," which he repeated, shaking his head solemnly over a final glass.

As he went, not very steadily, up to bed, in bright daylight, he reached a conclusion and the landing at the same time.

"Fact is, the poor chap's still a bit sore."

CHAPTER IX

JAMES MacIVOR heard nothing of his brother's engagement until the day before the wedding—and then by a trivial accident—so far are east and west divided in this London Town.

Yet from the date on which *Times* and *Morning Post* had announced the forthcoming marriage of the Master of Stronaven and Miss Oenone Duvenant, only child of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Duvenant of Buenos Ayres and 40 Connaught Place, there was scarcely a daily or weekly paper that had not its paragraph with some fresh item of gossip concerning the event. In nearly every case the name of the Duchess of Monmouth was associated with the subject.

> The Duchess of Monmouth, the bridegroom's cousin, had designed the bridesmaids' dresses. It was to be a rose wedding, in compliment, it was believed, to her charming name of Rosalind.
>
> The Master of Stronaven and his bride will spend the first week of their honeymoon at Runnymede House, specially lent by the Duke and Duchess of Monmouth.
>
> Miss Duvenant, the Master of Stronaven's bride, is quite the youngest, prettiest and richest of all the heiresses who have recently carried off our matrimonial prizes.

The latest photographs of Miss Duvenant, the Master of Stronaven's fiancée," "Miss Duvenant's pearls," "Miss Duvenant's trousseau," "Mrs. Duvenants' wonderful home in London: An interview"—thus it went on day after day, down to the enterprising afternoon special that thought it worth while to herald in thick headlines the approaching arrival of Mr. Duvenant. "Millionaire father's record journey"—"Thirty-six hours in England for daughter's marriage"—"Just time to give her away and drink the bride's health."

It was through the medium of the press that the lonely priest was made acquainted with the news.

"Seen this, Fawther?"

An illustrated halfpenny paper was thrust out to him, a black thumb planted upon the interesting page. The owner of the thumb was a very black sheep, indeed, and in his pastor's black books on many dark counts.

Father MacIvor had halted to speak to him on the sweltering pavement within the beery airs that issued from that corner public house, where so much of his daily toil was daily undone. For two days he had been looking for the sinner.

"Ah, there you are, Barnes," he had just exclaimed. "Your poor wife is in great distress about you—I hope these rumors I hear are not true." It was at this point that he had been interrupted by the man's insolent leer.

It was never easy for James MacIvor to rebuke his miserable flock. Only a few miles away, where dwelt the class to which he himself belonged—wealthy, intellectual,

free, surrounded by beauty and comfort in life—he knew that sin was deliberate, sought, inexcusable. There, he felt, he would have it in him to fulminate. But here, amid the ignorant, the half-starved, the ill-paid, it seemed to him that, speaking humanly, sin was unavoidable.

The man before him, lolling against the wall of the public house, the stump of a cold pipe sticking out of one corner of his mouth, and as much beer as he'd money to pay for dimming such poor wits as he had, was a hopeless ruffian it was true, yet what chance had he ever had to be anything else?

"Come back to your poor wife, Barnes," he said less sternly. "There's no blessing on him who breaks his marriage vows."

The man held out the paper again, rolling his head from side to side with a swagger that was half insolent, half humorous.

"Now, Fawther, just you cast 'arf an eye on this 'ere paper before you go for to talk so much! We'd do it all right and proper in Westminster Abbey, too, if we could afford to pay the bishops and the judges!"

Still completely at a loss, the priest drew back. The fellow was tipsy, and there was nothing to be done with him for the moment. Mechanically accepting the grimy sheet thrust upon him he glanced down.

The blood rushed to his forehead. The face of his brother looked at him from the smudged page. An unreasonable anguish clutched at his heart. He was very tired. The purlieus of St. Michael's were no bad presentment of Tophet in the July heat. He staggered a little, folded the paper in two as if with an instinct of

concealment, turned and crossed the street. A shout of laughter followed him.

"Yes, that's right, take it 'ome, Fawther!"

The whole of the middle page of the little scurrilous paper was devoted to illustration. Underneath each picture ran the explanatory text.

As the priest spread the sheet upon his writing table, he felt like one in a bad dream.

SOCIETY WEDDING TOMORROW.
HON. IAN MACIVOR, THE MASTER OF STRONAVEN, MARRIES BEAUTIFUL HEIRESS.

These were the headlines. Underneath was his brother's image, unmistakable even upon that vile print. And next an unknown portrait—a pretty, childish face on a long throat, emerging from some cloud-like scarfs.

Below Ian's photograph ran the words: "The Master of Stronaven, who divorced his first wife only last September—just back from lion hunting in East Africa. A gentleman who certainly does not lose any time."

Below the girl's: "Miss Oenone Duvenant has not lost any time either. Only made her debut in May."

Then followed a blurred snapshot; a walking figure in clerical garments.

"*A contrast,*" this was headed, and underneath ran the inscription: "The Hon. James MacIvor, R. C. Priest at St. Michael's, the Master of Stronaven's only brother. Will he go to the wedding?"

The date of the paper was yesterday.

Perhaps the first pang that struck home was one purely

human. His only brother, and he had not been told! Not one of them had told him; not one had cared enough to save him from the agony and shock of this chance discovery! He had not even been informed of Ian's return!

Then came the sense of the overwhelming calamity which Ian was bringing upon himself.

James knew his brother; knew that his love for Morna had been intertwined with his whole life; that however he might hack down what was left of that once glorious plant, its roots were fixed, so to speak, in the vital tissues and could only die with his death—if then.

This act of irredeemable folly was to punish the guilty —that was its sole motive. And Ian was sacrificing all that had made him a high and honorable gentleman to gratify a savage lust of retaliation; sacrificing not only himself but also another and most innocent existence.

Father MacIvor glanced at the paper again—Why, she was a child! Then there seemed to rise from the whole sheet, as it were, a smoke of sordidness, of evil. On the same page, together with the pictures of the bride and bridegroom, and that snapshot of his own poor shabby hurrying figure, was a series of groups from the latest musical comedy. "The naughtiest play in London." "Won't it be a success!" "Critics shocked—Record rush for seats!" So ran the comments.

It was then only that the priest in him woke again completely. The mere stirring of humanity became overwhelmed in a rush of spiritual agony.

"Oh, God!" his lips formed the words dumbly. "Oh, God of patience!"

The reek of it seemed to rise in his nostrils. It was all sin, sin—the light, trivial, vulgar sin, by the side of the deep passionate sin. And there was the beer stain which had fallen on the faces of his brother and of the ignorant child-bride, in that foul public house within a stone throw of him! And there, the grimy thumb-mark of the brutal tipsy ruffian who had abandoned his wife and children.

As once before, only a few months ago, he crumpled the sheet and thrust it into his grate. No fire to consume it today—he ground it with his heel, with an unwonted violence—minister and messenger of evil that it was.

Just at that moment the organ at St. Cecilia's was pealing out, and the boys' voices were rising and falling in a delicate chant of Palestrina's, as bride and bridegroom came down the church—the Duchess of Monmouth had decided that nothing so banal as Mendelssohn or Wagner should be associated with her rose wedding.



BOOK III

For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

Song of Solomon.



CHAPTER I

IT would have been difficult to believe that a whole year had passed over the heads of the placid Inglis couple since that day when James MacIvor had sat with his burden of family sorrow at their cheerful breakfast table. These two pursued the jog-trot of their existence along the most leveled, comfortably metaled of roads, with scarce an indication to show that the way lay downhill toward the Valley of Shadows. It was not that the awful issues of life and death were not ever present to them: more present, indeed, than anyone outside their faith could imagine. But they were as travelers—it is perhaps no exaggeration to say—who look forward to the hospitable welcome awaiting them at the end of their journey: lights, friends, peace and a familiar and trusted Host. For these good, unimaginative beings belonged to the class to whom their religion brings comfort rather than awe. Mr. and Mrs. Inglis were never more cheerfully disposed than when, after the first Friday's Bona Mors devotion, they trotted side by side out of the chapel which they had founded, toward the well-spread tea table. To pass from the contemplation of their last moments to the discussion of drop-scones, was to them as natural a proceeding as, by-and-by perhaps, would be the actual transit from their

kindly activities to the death-bed and its total renunciations.

It is not to be expected that people who thus take the next world with such matter-of-fact placidity could waste much anxiety upon the fugitive distresses of this one. And yet, as once again, this September morning, they sat themselves to breakfast after early Mass, it was the affairs of Stronaven that formed their staple preoccupation, and cast, even upon Mrs. Inglis, a certain air of gravity.

"I think I'll write to James."

Her husband grunted; she had already made the remark twice. He was doubtful of the advisability of the step, and had said so the first time. But he knew that by the end of breakfast she would have said it so often that the matter would be settled.

"Another egg, dear? Oh, do, Robert! A slice of ham then? Oh, don't get up, I'll cut it for you—just a shaving. Quite the best ham Maclaren has yet sent—Oh, yes, about James—you see—" Mrs. Inglis was cutting deftly as she spoke: an old-fashioned woman, she loved to serve her lord. "About James, dear. You see, Lady Juditha writes, that he's looking shocking, shocking. I'll read it to you." She put the plate with its fairy slices before him, drew the mustard and the hot rolls closer, and peeped into his coffee cup. Satisfied, she returned to her seat, the keys in the silk pocket she wore outside her dress, jingling with her brisk step. She now pulled a voluminous letter from its envelope and sought through the pages, murmuring fragments of sentences as she did so:

" 'I wish I could say Jane Dun is improving'—You re-

member Jane Dun, dear? Terribly difficult character—" She burst into her inappropriate laughter. " 'You were greatly missed at the last meeting'—hum, hum. Dear Lady Juditha, she seems to think there are no devils to fight up at Craigstoun—Ah, here it is: 'I saw Father MacIvor at the settlement meeting. He's looking dreadfully ill!' " Mrs. Inglis laid down her letter. "Poor boy, I'm sure he's had no holiday. Worked to death at that dreadful place! Oh, dear, when I think of the life he leads—how are people like ourselves ever to get to Heaven, Robert!" Her laughter ran like a merry subterranean stream. "You see, Robert, dear, I thought I'd have him here, and make him stay at least a week or ten days, and feed him up and give him a real rest—Mass not a minute earlier than eight. I'm sure I don't mind getting a substitute for him. They're such obliging dears at Forest Gate. And this is rather a slack time, isn't it? And it isn't only that, Robby. I'm thinking of someone else. I'm thinking of poor Ian. You see I want to do a stroke of business there, too. Kill two birds with one stone, ah-ah-ah! Fergusson tells me the Master looks 'unco strange—no himsel',' he said, 'no himsel'! I wouldna say he wasna like to go the way of the old lord.' Those were his very words —what, dear Robert?"

Mr. Inglis had repeated the remark he had offered before on the subject, and it ran thus:

"It's placing James in a very awkward position."

"Oh, I know, dear. I know, I know." Mrs. Inglis' pretty jovial face assumed its air of artificial melancholy, with pursed lip and sentimental tilt of head. "It's all dreadfully awkward, dreadfully sad! I'm sure no one

knows what I felt in deciding not to go and see them and call upon the poor young woman."

Here she paused, for internal grindings on the other side of the table proclaimed that Mr. Inglis was about to deliver himself of another observation. He opined that the "poor young woman" seemed to be enjoying herself remarkably well, and he doubted whether any visit of Mrs. Inglis would have added to that enjoyment.

"Oh, I know, dear, I know—poor old Stronaven is filled with one set of empty-headed smart people after another. Such extravagance, old Kirstie says—They've turned her out you know, Robby. I'm afraid it will be the death of her. The hours as they keep! What with their tangoes, and their card playing; the dressing up and the costume dinner parties—poor old Stronaven! And I'm sure, what would I be doing in the midst of all that!" Her mirth was innocent of any rancor. "Poor, dear old Stronaven," she repeated. "I suppose you've heard what they've done in the west wing? Electric light, and chauffage central, and the general upholstering, and that child's mother, that Mrs. Duvenant, dear, says, I hear, she'll never rest till it's as good as Minever Castle! They mean to do the east wing in the spring. What all this money craze is bringing us to! Goodness knows, I'd feel sick enough in any case at going back there without Morna—letting alone the awfulness of seeing anyone in Morna's place——"

Mr. Inglis frowned and then growled, pushing his plate away unfinished:

"You wouldn't see anyone in Morna's place—Morna's place is gaping."

"So it is, dear." She swerved quickly away from the mention of a name which was painful to both, and which only escaped her in the inadvertence of her volubility. "I'm not thinking of that little doll of a thing. It's Ian I'm thinking of. Not to see Ian is like turning my back on my own child." Here a crow of laughter escaped her. "I mean, if I'd had a child. Oh, well, there, dear, you know what I mean. But the Bishop made it very clear, very clear. 'There's no objection to your going to see your friends,' he said. 'Only it would be advisable to make it understood that you are not recognizing, or in any way approving, their action.' How could I possibly go and see the poor young thing and say, 'You quite understand that my coming here doesn't mean that I think Ian's properly married.' Ah-ah-ah! And it's all very well, dear, to say it's awkward for James. But surely if anybody is likely to do a little good, it is his own brother, and he a priest. And really, Robert, I assure you, Fergusson's account——"

Mr. Inglis rose. He had already had the old gillie's narrative retailed to him with an exactitude that had not omitted even the man's coughs and gestures. He was not sure enough of his own attitude to offer further opposition.

"You'll have to tell James, when you write, that you'll provide the substitute."

"Yes, dear, I'll write this morning. I'll say—I think there'll be no harm in saying, you think he'd better come here for Ian's sake."

But the door had already closed. Mrs. Inglis chuckled and got up, drawing the keys from her bag.

The details of her comfortable housekeeping being accomplished, she set herself without further delay, to write to James MacIvor.

DEAR JAMES,

You must come to us for a little visit. Lady Judith Osborne gave me quite an alarming account of your appearance. And if you break down, now at the beginning of the winter, what is to become of your poor flock? I wish you mission priests would have a little common-sense, from time to time. I want you to stay a good fortnight, and I will write to Forest Gate and make all arrangements for a substitute. There will be no difficulty on that score. The good monks, as you know, are only too glad —from every point of view.

You must not think, dear James, that Robert and I have not seriously reflected before inviting you up here. At first sight, no doubt, you may think it an odd thing to do. But the truth is, we have heard certain rumors about Ian which make us feel rather uneasy. We should not like to take the responsibility of not letting you know. Dear James, I really think you ought to come up and see him. There is nothing but what is right and fitting in his own brother doing this. And it is not as if you would be staying at Stronaven or condoning in any way. The people about say Ian is not at all like himself. I hear he looks wretchedly and—well, do come! If it can be managed, I know you will.

Milly was up at Stronaven the other day, but did not come to see us. Of course we have not been there ourselves since all the terrible change.

Her pen ran as easily as her tongue. She re-read the sheets with a small gurgle of approbation, closed and directed the letter.

CHAPTER II

A WEEK later James MacIvor arrived. Painful, anomalous as the situation was; humiliating, even, to one of his persuasion and temperament, the call of his brother's need was not to be resisted. It was true, moreover, that he himself was fairly worn out in mind and body, and Mrs. Inglis' kindly common-sense had truly stated the situation: he would be of little use for the hard winter months were he to break down now.

It was with sensations akin to agony that he came back to his own country, to the proximity of his old home; his own dear land, golden in that early autumn glow which decked her with even more than the beauty he had so often dreamed of, pined for—stamped now to his eyes with the ineffaceable misfortune. It was like meeting mother or beloved, and gazing upon a cherished face, with the knowledge of a mortal sorrow intervening. Brand of shame, sentence of death!

His first Mass in the little chapel that was to him a shrine thronged with so many hallowed and happy memories, was one of those experiences which come to every mystic soul, sooner or later, in the service of the Crucified—one of those hours when, by some singular dispensation, all spiritual help seems to be withdrawn, and poor humanity

is left in desolation: when between a barren rocky space, filled with the clamor and mockery and all the power of evil, and a sky darkened and aloof, the spirit seems to hang abandoned.

He lingered over his thanksgiving, crying out, striving in vain to rend the unendurable darkness; and no whisper responded, no faintest ray vouchsafed illumination.

Yet when he walked at length into the sunny dining-room, Mrs. Inglis, looking up with a remonstrance on her lips, checked herself sharply. Two startling thoughts crossed each other in her mind: "James looks like death!" And then "His face is as the face of an angel."

It was a day of wonderful serenity, wonderful charm. The country seemed to give out as well as to receive light; paying back in flame of birch tree, in scarlet of cherry and oak, in yellow of elm, in copper and gold of bracken, all the sun's long prodigality. The first fairy frost had left a delicate purity in the air. But, a little later in the day, the world would be as warm as in mid August, so gloriously did the heavens promise. Mrs. Inglis applauded her guest's decision to go out for a quiet stroll.

"Oh, yes, do, Father James. You can't afford to waste an hour of such a morning! It's part of your cure, you know. Tut-tut, we must have a better appetite for lunch. Take him to see the new plantation, Robert. Won't you, dear?"

Mr. Inglis had twisted himself in his seat, and started grinding—he was rather busy. James glanced at him gratefully. His one desire was to be alone, alone in the solitary hills, where he and Ian and Morna had played as

children—Ian and Morna—happy, loving; ignorant of even the meaning of evil.

He set out swiftly across the fields, through the woods, till the well-remembered stretch of heather rose before him, a glowing tapestry under the sunlight, with purple mists in the hollows, the group of pines black against the blue, and here and there the marvelous fire of dwarf birks, silver-stemmed. The heat increased as he struck the moorland path, making for that rise of rock which had been their favorite meeting-place in the old days. He was glad enough to fling himself down under its shadow, on the dry ling, and for a little while the radiant scene, the exquisite arches of sky, the hot air with its wild savors, the haunting cry of the peewit, filled him with a transitory sense of peace.

The respite was at first purely physical. But presently his mind began to wander, too—not with the active misery of a little while ago, but with a pathos that was not all painful—to the memories of the past. . . . Ian and Morna! Light, childish figures chasing each other round these very stones. Morna's dark hair floating behind her as she ran. Her small face under the scarlet cap, vividly colored with exercise and excitement, her eyes dancing—a very wild-flower of a creature! . . . And Ian! . . . Ian had always looked like a King's son to his brother's adoring eyes: a domineering, splendid being; fierce, quick, headlong, determined; audacious to folly. "The Maister's nae better than a young wildcat," old Fergusson used to say, chuckling. There stood the ruined chapel—scene of so many absorbing games—the gray of its stones gilded in the sunshine. Through the gaping archway, he could see

the yellowing bracken burn like fire against the great gorse bush that held the place of the altar.

It was on the jutting rock now overshadowing him that the sixteen-year-old Morna had sat, her chin in her hand, gazing out to those far-away hills. And it was here Ian had lain at her feet, lost in contemplation of her. That was the moment when, in all its innocence, its exquisite first freshness, their love had been born!

James moved uneasily and sat up. The pain awoke and cried within him. He was facing a new stretch of country. The moor dipped and rose, and broke into cross-valleys filled with bracken; and, like the outpost of an army, groups of stone pines stood against the golden woods that belted the park of Stronaven. The scene slowly impressed itself on his mind. Ian was somewhere yonder. How did it fare with him? He need scarce ask himself the question. He knew how it must fare with him—badly. Badly!

Someone came out from under the shadow of the woods, leaping the well-remembered ditch and breasting the rise of ground. The figure advanced at an extraordinarily rapid pace; and, halfway across the moor, suddenly halted, wheeled round, as if it had been arrested by a call.

James' pulses drummed. Inner prescience had warned him before eye had recognized. He wanted to cry out, wave his arms. But yet he sat held in palsy. Then, running, his brother advanced toward him.

It seemed as if the Master had scarce known why he ran; certainly not to whom he was running. James had a vision of a haggard face set in abstraction, and of fixed unspeculative eyes. He sprang to his feet. They were

but a couple of yards apart. The two stood, speechless, gazing on each other. James could scarcely see through the mist before his eyes; he could not speak for the lump in his throat.

"He is glad to see me, Oh, he is glad after all"—the words rang in his brain. It was the first gleam of resurrection joy in the desolation: Love was there in Ian's heart; God was there still.

The Master caught his brother by the shoulder and shook him.

"To think of its being you, up here, by the old stones! Did you call, just now?" he asked abruptly then. James shook his head. "Odd!" The other passed his hand over his brow. "Something called me over there. I hadn't a notion of turning this way." But even as he spoke the words, the kindly light in his eyes was replaced by a look of sharp suspicion, and his face hardened. "What's brought you up here? Come to preach?"

James was silent. The sensitive soul recoiled. An anxious, deprecating expression came into the gaze which a moment before was as full of dumb love as a dog's. Ian's frown deepened:

"Where are you staying?"

The other cleared his throat:

"Craigstoun."

The Master laughed harshly.

"Of course—the unco gude all together!"

"Heaven knows I'm not good! . . .

Rarely had words come with such difficulty to his tongue. But the humble sincerity of his accents, and that look, still doglike in its bewildered appeal, seemed suddenly

to go straight to his brother's heart. Ian's air of rancor broke; his countenance became tender and anguished all at once.

"Oh, Jimmy!" he cried, and the echo of the old childish days in the hoarse voice struck the hearer with a poignancy that seemed unbearable. "Oh, Jimmy," repeated the Master, and then with that abruptness of movement that had always been characteristic of him, but which was now abnormally intensified, cast himself face downwards on the dry heather.

James knelt beside him with a thickly beating heart.

"Ianny!" The pet name leaped out; for one second he thought his brother was weeping. But the Master sat up and laughed.

The mission priest knows more of the phases of sorrow than of any other emotion that besets humanity. James saw that Ian's eyes had the haunted brightness of one, the fountain of whose tears has been dried up within him. It was a desert wind that was blowing, hot and terrible, in his soul.

"I'm past preaching at, old man, and past praying for."

"I didn't come up here for that," said James, in his dry way. He tried to add: "I wanted to see you," but the words stuck in his thoat, and he said instead, "I am a bit run down, you see."

His companion scanned him with that too bright gaze.

"You look," he said, "a regular old death's-head. Hard work saving people's souls, eh?"

The priest thought with a rending pity, as he returned the gaze:

"It's harder work to try and lose one's own soul, Oh, my poor Ianny!"

There was something intangibly wrong, out of balance, in the countenance which the Master of Stronaven turned upon his brother. It was not only that the fierce tan, burned in by an African sun, was fading into the broken, livid color that is so familiar on the faces of our soldiers home from the tropics; it was not only that the strong lines of the features had become oversalient; it was not altogether either, the unnatural brilliancy of the eyes—what filled the brother with apprehension, was that the whole countenance bore an impress as of some mortal ailment. He knew too well the look of the fatally stricken. His heart contracted: this deadly sickness, was it not of the soul and past mending? Ian smiled.

"Yes, Father?" he said in gentle mockery, as if answering the other's unspoken thought. And again there fell silence between them.

Ian stretched himself full length on the heather, and supporting his head on one hand, idly plucked at some tufts with the other. James sat erect, a solemn figure in his clerical black, his ugly ascetic face set into anxious lines. He was seeking in his mind for that word of true intuition which should find a way through those locked gates.

"Well," said the Master suddenly. "You're a nice kind of fellow, I am sure! Don't you want to hear all about my new domestic bliss? You never even congratulated me."

The blood rushed to the priest's forehead. He had a glance of quick reproach for the taunt, and held his thin

lips closer together upon the silence which was his best rebuke.

Ian pulled the plant he had been playing with from the ground and flung it away with a gesture of latent savagery. Then he began filling up the hole and smoothing it down. The priest's glance, unconsciously following these movements, suddenly became riveted on the restless hand. Once again he colored violently.

Ian was wearing Morna's ring!

On the third finger there was that ring of three strands of different golds intertwined. It had been a gift of great meaning between them.

Visions rose of the ravaged garden, the massacred rooms, the hacked panel. Ian who had, he knew, striven to ravage, massacre and hack away all traces of her presence in his mind; who had cut the link between them in such frenzied haste, and forged a fresh one with another woman—Ian to be wearing Morna's ring!

The Master noted his brother's fixed gaze.

"Yes," he said, again as if the other had spoken. "Yes, that is the way with me." He lifted the ring to his lips and kissed it. Rolling over on his back, he clasped his hands under his head and lay staring up at the pure beauty of the sky.

Still James had no words. This discovery was fraught with such tremendous significance that, for the moment, his mind refused to grasp it. He had wanted to pierce the locked gates; now it seemed as if they had suddenly parted of themselves. And the glimpse of the fire within appalled him. Yet Ian lay very still and, beginning to speak now, his voice was calm, almost monotonous.

"God knows why I didn't fling the ring away with the rest. Something held me back. I believe I thought that at the end of all I'd be buried in it. I had vowed it to her, you know. . . . You remember she always had a hankering after those old notions, our rising again on the last day and so forth. She liked that picture; 'The Sea shall give up its Dead,' and I was to wear my ring. . . ." He gave a laugh. The listener felt as if his brother's misery were lying on his own soul, crushing it each instant with more intolerable weight. "Anything that can remind me of her . . ." the voice went on. "I have a bit of wild-myrtle here, in my button-hole. There was the breath of the wild-myrtle always about her . . . Morna!" His voice broke on the name with an ugly sound as if something within him were tearing. He sat up and looked at his companion with those eyes of dry despair. "It is hell, you know," he said then in his former uninflected accents. "My own hell! I made it for myself. And one does not get out of hell—that's sound doctrine, isn't it, Jimmy? . . ." He leaned over and suddenly spoke in a whisper: "Jimmy, have you heard anything of her?"

James shook his head. His conscience was stabbed: he had never thought of seeking Morna. Should he not have sought her? The eager light faded from the Master's face, and he fell back.

"Ah, well!" It was a sigh of illimitable weariness.

James sat beside him, helpless, with his dumb tongue and his aching heart. Yet had he had the gift of eloquence and persuasiveness, what could he have said? What was there to say? Ian had made his own hell and there

was no getting out of it. Then the elder said these startling words:

"If I were to turn Catholic like you, I'd have to take her back."

"Ian! . . ."

"There's no divorce recognized with you fellows, is there? Why should I not become converted like you—eh, Jimmy? It would make it all so easy. I should be living in sin, if I remained with another. It would be my duty to seek Morna. Oh, I'd find her fast enough—and she'd come back to me fast enough! Don't you see, Jimmy, what I am suffering, she's suffering? We two had always the same thought—first-class religion, yours. A man can only have one living wife. Oh, I've learned that! I've learned that now!"

The jeering tone had wandered into a groan.

"What's the use of this, Ian?" said his brother a little sternly. "It will not help you, to mock at sacred things: things at least, that are sacred to other people."

"Meaning you?" said the Master with his ready sneer.

"Meaning me," said James.

Ian sat up.

"I'm not mocking. I'm serious enough. Yes, God knows, it's gone deep enough! It's—it's—" he broke off, beat the earth with his hand, and turned his face sharply aside, staring upwards toward the rock that jutted, rugged, against the sky. "Do you remember," he said then, "How she sat up there? Oh, Jimmy!"

James laid a timid touch on the restless hand that beat the ground. The Master gripped the cold fingers and turned his face again toward him.

"After all," he resumed, "supposing I wanted to be converted—you could not cast off the offer of my immortal soul—could you? Why, you're no true missioner! Oughtn't you to want to save the lost sheep? Why shouldn't I have the true call, as well as you? Come now, Father James, why don't you speak? Ah—" he broke into wild laughter and fell back, drawing himself away and propping himself against the rock. "Ah, Jimmy, your religion is only skin-deep. You'd be afraid of the scandal! You're——"

"Stop, Ianny!" James lifted his thin hand; then began to speak rapidly in a low voice, the quick beating of his heart running with a kind of quiver through the words: "If ever God sent you a true call—or rather, if ever, Oh, Ianny dear, if ever your ears were opened to hear the voice that is always calling you, then—'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate you from the Love of God.' If you felt that—do you think anything else could count, with me? Or for that matter, with you? But this——"

"Oh, you needn't go on," broke in the Master. "Poor old James! It would be a pretty nut to crack, even for your single-mindedness, I guess. I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it, anyhow. Not if the God you believe in so firmly, appeared to me there on that rock. There are things a man can't do! There are things a man must not do. Things that he'd better lose all he cares for in this world, and his soul in the next, rather than do. That other poor little creature—I sought her out—I've got the

charge of her, all the days of my life! I couldn't cast her away. . . . She—she's expecting her child!"

The priest started. In the miserable silence that followed, the cry rose within him: "Oh, poor Morna!" Then the form of his brother's announcement recurred to him: "She's expecting her child." Her child! "Poor little creature!" he echoed the husband's own phrase—the man who cared so little, that it was "her child" to him, not "our child."

"There are things a man can't do in honor, in decency," Ian repeated, and then the silence that was more communicative than speech once more enveloped them.

After a long pause the elder man began, again:

"At first, you see, my anger carried me on. I could only think of that: to punish her . . . to punish Morna! Until vengeance was accomplished there was such a fever in me. Sometimes I thought I could neither eat nor sleep nor rest again until it was done. Out in that wild hot place, I was more of a wild beast, there out in Africa, than any of those yellow brutes I killed. I wanted to get at Morna, to get at her soul and stab it! I did it, you see, and it's my own soul that's bleeding to death. Mad words, you think, old man! Nothing could be mad enough, bad enough, to describe what is going on in here, what I am, what I have become! . . ." He stopped with that laugh which hurt James the most of all. "I am not really mad, you know. Don't look at me like that, there's a good chap! It's not a bit of use anyhow. Pshaw! What a mess I made of it!"

He drew a cigarette case, opened it and held it toward his brother. His hand shook. The priest made a gesture

of refusal. The Master lit his cigarette and flung the match away; and, after two whiffs, flung the cigarette away, too. Then he got up, started off at a great pace as if, forgetful of his companion, he was bent on pursuing his walk. Then he brought himself up and came back and cast himself on the ground once more.

"It can't go on much longer like this," thought James. "He'll have a terrible breakdown." And, knowing that for Ian to be able to disburden his soul must be the only possible help, he forced himself to a question.

"It was when you came up here, I suppose, that it began to be intolerable?"

The Master's eyes flashed, then he glanced quickly from side to side, as if he were seeking an issue like a trapped animal.

"Yes, up here, where every stone cries: 'Morna!' I—Oh, what's the good of talking?"

"But she?"

"She, who?"

"Your . . . wife," said James awkwardly.

"My wife? Do you mean——?"

"I don't know her name even."

"Oenone—Oenone, call her that. Fancy your calling her my wife. You! Do you believe I'm married then?"

"No," said the priest almost in a whisper.

"No," repeated the other violently, "but she's the woman I've tied myself to. What do you want to know about her? How she takes it—how she takes me? I must be a comfortable kind of husband, don't you think? Well, it isn't so bad as you'd imagine, for her. Yes, and, in a

way, for me, too. Because, you see, James, old man, she doesn't care. She's not got it in her to care. Oh, just a little bit of thistle-down floating along. She's—sometimes I don't think she's got a soul at all. She's a kind of elf thing." He paused. "If she cared, you know," his voice took a sudden deep note, "there would have been only one thing for me."

He put his thumb to his forehead and gave a sharp click with his tongue.

"Oh, my God, Ianny!"

"I'm not going to do it now. Not yet anyhow. Not till I have seen Morna again."

"Oh, Ianny, for pity's sake!" The priest clasped his thin hands and wrung them. "Don't rob God of the power of mercy."

The other stared at him as if he did not understand the words, or the cause of this distress. Under contracted brows his fiercely luminous eyes seemed fixed on a distant vision.

"Do you think she is still living with that man?"

"Morna?"

"Morna, of course——"

"To tell you the truth," said James—his voice rang strongly out of the inner, intense conviction that had never left him, "I have not been able to believe for one moment that Morna did this evil."

Rage seized the Master. He drew a hissing breath and thrust his head forward, his lips curling back from his clenched teeth.

"James, you fool! She went away with him openly. Didn't you read her letter? It was in the papers,

printed—printed, her shame for all the world to read! Why, she flung it in my teeth James——"

He caught himself back on the edge of a scream. There came a pause, tense and vibrating. His steady sad gaze fixed on that convulsed countenance, Father MacIvor said very slowly:

"Ian—then, there was some reason."

The Master started.

"Ian, what had you done?"

"I?" Ian turned a look of extraordinary questioning upon his brother, and it seemed to the latter as if some eye of the soul, hitherto blinded, opened in that look. "James, what do you?—I—" He stammered and shifted his glance; a dark flush rose to the haggard face.

James leaned forward, the priest in him yearning over the sinner; the brother over the brother. His lips were parted, his eyes tenderly widening as if he could draw in the confession that was to ease the tormented mind. But the Master stiffened suddenly; he moved back. Anger leaped in him again:

"What nonsense! You priests, you're always on the scent for sin, aren't you? Regular sleuthhounds for tracking secrets and mysteries! What had I done to Morna? Good heavens, man, drop it, I say! What's the good of playing that fool game with me? I'm pretty desperate as it is, without your trying to make out it's my fault. My fault? Why, I had not left her side for a day or night, for two years. Until that—that—" It was a dreadful look of rage that convulsed his face again—"until that fellow came into the house, there was never as

much as a misgiving between us. My fault? What the devil do you mean? You're a pretty brother!"

He got up and James did likewise.

"I'm afraid," said the latter, "I must be going." He put out his hand in his ungainly way, and drew it back. "Don't let's part like this, Ianny. I'd—" his voice shook. "I'd give all I have to be able to help."

He did not apologize for the question that had so greatly incensed his brother, because—as clearly as ever in the confessional—he had seen into another's soul, and had had the apprehension of the secret stain. The Master was stamping his feet, knocking the dry springs of heather off his kilt.

"I suppose if I were to ask you to come back with me, down there and lunch, you would not come?" he said.

James had a quickly suppressed movement of shrinking. Slight as it was, it did not escape his companion, who burst into laughter.

"I knew you'd take it that way," he cried.

"I would come, Ian. . . . I will come."

"Nonsense—I don't want you to come. I said it just to see you curl up."

"But, Ian, indeed——"

"Indeed, Father James, I'm quite of your opinion. What would you be doing down there, in that crew? Oh, we've got a giddy little throng at Stronaven. And my mother-in-law . . . you'd like her; she's such a real lady! They'll tango after lunch. Mrs. Duvenant—that's my mother-in-law, you might as well know her name—doesn't think her Oenone ought to dance the tango, just now, but she's a delicacy in saying so. Rosie is there, too. Rosie

Monmouth, you know. She's been my guardian angel all through this business! She loves to see others blessed, does Rosalind. You remember her of old. Oh, certainly, we don't want your old death's-head at the feast, such a happy family party as we are! I'm off, old man—or they'll be drawing the loch for my body."

He sprang away as he spoke; stopped to wave his hand and smile over his shoulder; and then started running down the hill, leaping from stone to stone and vaulting the low bushes across his way.

His brother stood gazing after the retreating figure, till the shadows of the pines caught it out of sight, when, with bent head and slow heavy steps, he began to retrace his way toward Craigstoun.

The glory of the wonderful day encompassed him; the scent of bog-myrtle and dying heather, of hot pine wood and wild thyme and the other herbs of the moor rose about him like incense. The plovers called to each other with wide, circling cries; the beauty that he loved intensified the deep melancholy in his own heart. And, added to the sense of hopelessness, the lamenting pity, the anguish for his brother's anguish which possessed him, was the sting that, by his own stupidity, by his cowardly second of withdrawal, they had parted upon this horrible note of jeering. And yet, as he went, all was no longer black misery, as it had been that morning in the chapel. The Ian that had seemed to him as a strange man, licentious in fury, desecrating all that he had honored; blatant, violent; the man who had thought no shame, for mere lust of vengeance, to set another in the place of the woman he had loved from childhood; the incomprehensible, unnatural Ian

was gone, and here was the real man again. What if he had come back to himself, only to suffer, almost beyond bearing—he was suffering through his own deed, and suffering in expiation.

He who expiates is nearing forgiveness. The one wholly noble thing in Ian's life had been his love for Morna.

"Thank God," the brother said to himself, "it could not be killed! Even if it kills him," he went on pursuing the stern thought steadily in his soul, "it is better so."

"Dear me, James," said Mrs. Inglis, chuckling despairingly, "your walk does not seem to have given you an appetite! Dear, dear, you went too far, I'm afraid. I always say I'd rather nurse ten women than one man. Well, I suppose coming up here again is a bit trying. Did you go near Stronaven? What do you say, Robert dear? Aren't the chops right? Tut-tut!"

CHAPTER III

JAMES MACIVOR went to the chapel early that night. Mr. and Mrs. Inglis were each occupied upon their after-dinner game of patience, and the lady who could never get beyond "Miss Milligan" was so absorbed in the struggle as to have become almost silent. She scarce uttered more than a cluck of assent when the priest whispered his intention to withdraw. Mr. Inglis, from his own table at the other side of the hearth, where the wood-fire was burning cheerily, nodded good night.

He had vaulting ambitions in the matter of patiences, and was elaborating a new one.

Certainly the guest was not wanted. He glanced back at the two before closing the door. What kind, happy, comfortable people they were. How placidly they were working out their salvation! But their very placidity was an irritation to his vexed spirit that evening.

He loved the hours in the chapel at night when he was alone to pray, when there was no light but that of the sanctuary lamp—rising and falling in the darkness as if with the pulsing of a watchful heart.

All day, since his meeting with Ian, he had been wrestling with the problem of that tormented life, knowing it, from the first, humanly insolvable. There was nothing anyone could do. There was no issue but in the mercy of God. Tonight, worn out with the long struggle, he let his soul just slip into that sea of mercy, and rest there. And there came to him in a moment, consolation.

Sunrise in the altitudes, the whiteness of untouched snow, the air of the mountains, too rarified almost for mortal breathing, and yet instinct as with life itself; an illimitable stillness, a sense of awful purity, of silence reposeful beyond description; solitude, aloofness—how faint the image, how impossible to express through the gross medium of words, the apprehension of the presence of God to the mystic soul! All thoughts of the world, all earthly clamors, agitations and sorrows fall away; personality itself is lost. The whole human frame has become as but the chalice to be filled to the brim.

There came a short rapping at the locked door that

gave on the grounds; the door, open all day to such as chose to enter, and only closed for safety at nightfall. He started from his abstraction. He scarce knew what had summoned him back to material things. The knocking was repeated. Something familiar in its peremptory triple tap set his heart beating. And, as he unbolted the door and drew it slowly back, there indeed stood Ian in the moonlight.

"I thought it was you!" he exclaimed involuntarily, even as his brother greeted him with:

"That you, Jimmy? Thought I'd find you here, somehow!"

"What is it?" James asked. For a wild moment the conjunction of the sudden appearance with that hour of ravishing peace before the tabernacle started a hope which dizzied him; but it died as it sprang, for an impatient movement of Ian's had brought his face fully under the moon rays. It was more marked with torment even than it had been that afternoon.

"Come for a walk with me—will you? It's—it's a grand night. Damn it."

"Oh, hush!" James stepped forward and drew the door behind him.

"Are you coming?" cried the other.

"Yes, Ianny, I'll come—just one minute!" He went back into the chapel, took the key from the inside and proceeded to lock the door from without; he could feel the while in his own nerves the fret of his brother's impatience.

Yet, as they went side by side down the laurel walk that opened on the road to the moor—Mr. and Mrs. Inglis

were very fond of laurels—the Master, slowly pacing, his bonnet in his hand, bareheaded to the keen delicate airs, was more quiet than he had yet shown himself. Even to his fevered soul the peace of the moonlit night seemed to have penetrated. There was just a fairy web of frost about the world; that touch of cold purity that gives such an incomparable taste to every breath. The twigs crackled under their feet; and all was so still that the dry whisper of a falling leaf was audible, and the beat of a startled bird's wing sounded in their ears as with a great rushing.

While James unlatched the wicket gate, Ian put out his hand.

"Listen," said he. "How the burn is talking!" Then he sighed and roughly exclaimed: "Come, man, let's get out of this."

And James, with a sickening heart, told himself how happy they might have been, she and Ian, good comrades with minds attuned, on such a night. Now the pain between them poisoned all, and each appeal of beauty awakened misery afresh.

They breasted the rough moor path breaking off from the road; a small wind blew down upon them, delicious as a draught of iced wine.

The Master pressed on ahead of his companion and only stopped when they had reached the higher ground of the moor; then he turned and waited.

"Let us go to the old chapel," he said, and started off again, James panting by his side.

When the ruined walls began to take shape before them, dark against the clear, faint sky, Ian halted.

"Have you ever heard the waters talk so much?" he said again.

"I suppose you had rain last week—" began James, and broke off. He stood peering anxiously at his brother. The glitter of the moon was in the Master's eyes—he was breathing very quickly, almost panting; and the dilation of his nostrils showed as if that breathing were a distress. The Master suddenly smiled, his teeth flashing white:

"I told you I wouldn't shoot myself, just immediately, didn't I? It comes to me, Jimmy, that I won't need to do it."

"Ianny!"

"Give me your hand, old boy."

He caught the priest's hand as he spoke and thrust it against his side. "Can't go on very long like that, can it?"

"Ianny! . . ."

James had cried out, terrified not so much by the rapid beating of the heart under his hand, as by the extraordinary violence of its pulsation—like the strokes of a hammer, it seemed to shake the man's whole frame.

"Oh, Ianny!" he exclaimed again. The Master stepped back from his touch, laughing—and quoted:

Es hämmert und klöpfelt bei Tag und bei Nacht:
Es hat mich schon längst um den Schlaf gebracht.

"Have you not seen a doctor?" James' voice quivered.

"What for? Isn't life the disease I want to be cured of?"

Sputet euch, Meister Zimmermann,
Damit ich balde ruhen kann!

"Oh, and you are so thin—Ian, do stop mocking for one moment!"

The Master suddenly flung an arm round his brother's shoulders.

"Be sensible, Jimmy. What's the good of this kind of life to me? Isn't it better that it should come to an end—before my reason gives way or—my patience? Anyhow, what's the good of doctors here? Ask yourself that. There's only one thing that would do me good, and that I'll never have again." He broke away, almost running: "Come on to the chapel."

He had not gone far, however, before he stumbled slightly and stopped.

"Let us sit down," he exclaimed.

James saw he was scarce able to draw a breath; but what was to be said before the desperate logic of his brother's argument?

The Master sat, bending slightly forward, pressing one hand to his side. After a while, he shifted his position, and lay, supported on one elbow, in a more easy attitude.

"Would you mind," he asked abruptly, "saying that thing again, about the height and the depths, the world nor the next—how did it go?"

"You mean the words from St. Paul?"

"I don't care whose they are. I want to hear them again."

The priest looked up at the serene luminous sky. He was glad Ian should want to hear the words again. It

seemed to his simplicity that no one could feel very far from God out in this great night's peace, under skies of such pure radiance. He repeated the verses.

The other listened in silence; and there followed a silence. And then he said, upon a long sigh:

"Yes, that's right, that's the way it should have been with me . . . and Morna. Nothing should have divided us. Nor might, nor death, nor angels, nor devils, nor sin, nor folly—nothing in heaven or hell should have kept us apart! I should have gone after her. Whatever she had done, she was my own wife. I wonder if she is dying, too, for want of me. I think she must be. Jimmy, after all, she was me. . . . The man jolly easily forgives himself when he's done wrong. . . . No, I ought never to have rested night nor day till I had tracked her. I ought to have plucked her from that thief in the night! Oh, how did it happen? Were we both mad? . . . Perhaps she was hypnotized? Perhaps my poor darling knew no more what she was doing than . . . Such things are . . . Oh, no, I am mad. She knew! She knew—her letter. . . . But it wasn't my Morna who wrote it. My Morna is somewhere— James, what does it all mean? Isn't it a bad dream only? Morna, the Morna of all our lives, could never have done that thing."

His voice, rough with agony, rising in ever wilder intonation, pierced the listener to the heart.

"Ah, Ianny," he said, "you and she were both forlorn adventurers!"

The Master turned his head sharply, as if arrested by the words. With one of his sudden twists of moods:

"Expound your text, good Father!" he said.

"It is all right with such as you so long as the seas are calm, and the skies fair; but at the first storm your boat is lost. How can you steer clear of rocks or sands —you have no guiding star, you have no compass——"

"Meaning?"

As if he had not noticed the sneer in the tone, the priest proceeded steadily, for he felt it right to speak what was in his mind.

"Meaning," he said gravely, "lives without God, lives without the rule of Christ."

"Mine and Morna's were that?"

"They were that, Ian. You were very happy together, and very good while you were happy. But the minute temptation came, and trouble—you were lost, both of you."

"I see," said the Master thoughtfully. His voice and manner had changed again. He sat silent, softly whistling to himself, and then:

"What was it you called us, Jimmy?"

"Forlorn adventurers," repeated the other sadly.

"Forlorn adventurers. . . . My God, you're right. Forlorn! Forlorn indeed! And Oh, the gallant adventure of our fine lives . . . what a shipwreck!"

James was silent. It had cost him a good deal to say so much. He could not have added another word.

Then in the deep pause, filled by the numberless mysterious noises of the night—the voice of the distant burn that had "talked" so unwontedly loud to Ian's ear; the whisper of the breeze over the heather; the chant of the swaying circle of pines hard by; the distant hooting of the owls in the park below them; further away, a homely

barking of dogs—there rose the singular deep call of the deer. The Master leaped up.

"There are things beyond the bearing of flesh and blood!" he cried. "From the house I am hunted into the night; and out of the night I am driven back to the house! Yes, it is ten thousand times worse to be out in the night, and to hear all those voices which she and I used to listen to! She loved the wild call of the deer. . . . Jimmy! There it is again! . . . And at the castle, they're dancing! I must go. Better that."

He had already started downhill at a round pace. James followed as quickly as he could. He lacked the reckless energy that drove his brother over the rough ground at such speed. Presently, the hills falling apart, the distant lights in the castle sprang into view and he heard the faint skirl of the pipes. It was borne on a puff of wind, circled about him like the flight of a bird, and was lost again.

When he reached the trees he stopped and called once or twice. Receiving no reply and pressed by anxiety, he pursued his way through the park as far as the lower terrace. There he stood again, uncertain. The pipe-music, wild and sad, seemed to fill the night air, for the windows of the great hall were open. The beat and the lilt rang maddeningly through his brain, setting his troubled thoughts to dance time.

All at once the piercing strains abruptly ceased, and a great shout of laughter rang out: Ian's voice uplifted above the others!

"Oh, my poor Ianny!" said James. He turned and walked toward Craigstoun; and it was only when the wind,

at a bend of the way, blew icy cold against his face, that he realized that it was wet with tears—those tears he had been forcing back upon his wrung heart all this hour.

CHAPTER IV

"TUT-TUT!" Mrs. Inglis clacked her tongue despairingly. "You don't look as if you'd slept a wink, Father James! I am disappointed. There's nothing for it, I see, but an egg-flip at eleven o'clock—beaten up in brandy. And Sanatogen after every meal. I have seen wonders done with Sanatogen. Oh, come, my dear James, you must consider yourself under obedience here, you know. Look upon me as your bishop for the time being!" She crowed jovially. "If you won't eat, you know, you must be supported somehow. What's that? What is it, Emmie?"

One of the rosy-cheeked parlor maids, who were Mrs. Inglis' special pets, and shone as examples of piety to the whole congregation, had entered, bearing a letter on a salver.

"It's for Father MacIvor, ma'am."

She came smiling round to the priest's side, and extended the tray. Emma always looked as if she were bursting with some delightful information.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mrs. Inglis, as James put out his pale hand doubtfully. "Who is it from, I wonder?"

"A groom has just driven over from the castle, ma'am. He could not wait; he had to hurry on to get some medicine for the doctor."

"The doctor? Ian's ill!" said James with a dull voice, looking up from the note. The hand that held it was trembling. "He's asking for me. He wants me."

"Dear, dear! Ian ill! I am sorry. I was afraid of it. Fergusson did say he was looking so strange—you remember I told you so, Robert. And always tearing about the hills. What is it, James dear? Poor boy, don't look so frightened! It mayn't be anything very bad, you know. We are all ill sometimes. Even I," she clucked comfortably.

"Rosalind says it's a heart attack."

"So the Duchess is there? Did she write?"

"Please, Mr. Inglis," James spoke in the same dull voice, "could somebody drive me over?"

Mr. Inglis turned his head. The parlor maid, Emma, her exquisitely polished tray pressed against her apron, stood smiling joyously, awaiting orders:

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell Andrew to come round at once with the cart."

"Yes, sir. I'll bid him no' be a minute."

"Thank you," said Father MacIvor. He rose from the table. "You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"Oh, James, James!" screamed his hostess, "at least finish your tea."

"Leave him alone, Jenny," growled Mr. Inglis.

The priest read over the note two or three times again.

DEAR JAMES, [wrote the Duchess]

Ian tells me you are at Craigstoun. Will you come over at once? The poor, dear fellow has had a heart attack and was found unconscious in the old

library, early this morning. The doctor has been here and says there's no reason for any undue alarm. But Ian seems to want to see you very much. So please come at once. Of course we must keep the dear boy as quiet as possible.

Your affectionate cousin,

ROSALIND MONMOUTH.

P.S.—I shall be very glad to see you and have a talk. I am sorry to say Mrs. Duvenant has wired for Milly. The last person! I think we ought to have the opinion of a specialist.

James' first impression on crossing the threshold of his old home once more was a sense of extraordinary change. The great hall was decked out with vivid-hued rugs and hangings of barbaric tints. The East End mission priest was too ignorant of fashion to know of the last social craze for trenchant color. It struck him as the extreme of inappropriateness to deck the solemn ancestral stone with gaudy rags. The beauty of this ancient place had lain in its dim mysterious spaces, colored only, here and there, by the faded hues of blazon or tapestries.

James, passed on, from footman to footman, into the care of a supercilious butler with catlike tread, found himself ushered by this latter into the library, where he was requested to state his name.

The priest smiled faintly as he answered that he was expected by his brother. "Show me upstairs, at once," he added with a note of haughtiness rarely heard in his voice.

The man ran him up and down with an offensively ap-

praising glance, and then remarking, "I'll inquire, sir," left him.

It was a singular reception for a son in his father's house. Every face he had met was a strange one. He could not be sorry for that; it would have been intolerable to have come under eyes which had witnessed last year's days of humiliation—but stranger still was the face that the old house turned upon him. Even this room, which was very little altered in arrangement, had an aspect unfamiliar, and to him repellant.

The atmosphere was heavy with some strange exotic scent, which had greeted him even from the hall; the tables were littered with photographs and pretentious unsuitable knick-knacks. A portrait—a daring sketch of a slender girlish figure, in some incredible fancy dress—hung over that very writing table where James had indited, a year ago, his appeal to his brother. Color and pose had drawn the priest's eye. He looked quickly away—the thing struck him as almost an offense to sanity.

A very fair young man, with a butterfly tie, green, spotted with orange, and a pale, impertinent, but not unpleasing, face, put his head in at the door, vaguely ejaculated "Hullo, what"—and disappeared.

James wondered whether the house party—"that crew," as Ian had dubbed it the day before—intended to remain on in spite of the host's illness. He'd never known much of society; but certainly manners must have changed extraordinarily since his younger days. Almost immediately afterwards the butler reappeared, and requested the visitor to follow him.

James could have laughed to find the old stone winding

stairs carpeted with a pile of incredible depth and of the impossible orange hue which seemed to be the favorite color in the new order of things. A velvet rope had replaced the old knotted hempen twist which had helped so many generations up and down the tower stairs. The man paused on the second flight, and opened a door. James advanced with a subdued tread, expecting to find himself in the sick-room; but stood, nonplussed. It was the most eccentrically decorated room he had ever beheld in his life. A lady rose to greet him from the black and white cushions of the sofa that stood before the fire.

"How do you do," she said, holding out a jeweled hand as she came forward. "I am glad, I'm sure, to make your acquaintance at last, Father MacIvor. You are James MacIvor, aren't you?" she added, scanning his face doubtfully.

James had his faint smile again. From boyhood he was accustomed to this hesitation in strangers. It was certainly difficult to connect him at first sight with handsome Ian.

"Oh, yes, I am James MacIvor," he said.

"I am Mrs. Duvenant."

They touched hands, without cordiality on either side.

"I think my brother expects me," said James, standing stiffly, in spite of a regal gesture inviting him to the black lacquer sofa.

"Pray sit down, Father MacIvor," said Mrs. Duvenant firmly. "I am very anxious to have a short conversation with you. Ian is, I believe, resting. So, at least, I understand from Rosalind." In spite of Mrs. Duvenant's unmistakable state of perturbation, in which there appeared

to be as much vexation as anxiety, she could not conceal her pride as she thus familiarly alluded to her new relative, the Duchess of Monmouth.

James sat down uncomfortably on the edge of the sofa, and Mrs. Duvenant fell back among the cushions with a profound sigh. She had, the priest noticed, all the airs of a hostess, and, glancing round the incredible room, with its riot of Chinese lacquer, its black and white upholstery, its barbarically shaped furniture, he thought that the Duvenant money and Duvenant taste had certainly stamped themselves enough upon the surroundings to claim them for their own.

"It seems singular," began the lady, "that we should meet as strangers, Father MacIvor. I trust I'm not making any mistakes in addressing you in this way? I have never frequented Roman Catholic society—in England." James bowed his head. "It does seem odd," pursued Mrs. Duvenant, with an acid titter, "that we should not have met before; more especially as I understand you're stopping in this neighborhood."

He murmured innocently that he was staying with Mr. and Mrs. Inglis.

"Indeed! We have never heard of Mr. and Mrs. Inglis. They have not, I believe, called upon my daughter."

"No," said James.

He felt the word to be bald and even rude—but he could think of nothing else to say.

"No," repeated Mrs. Duvenant. "Well, it does not matter!" She waved her hand. "There are questions of far deeper importance to be discussed. It is really of no consequence. All the neighbors of any standing have been

anxious to welcome the wife of the Master of Stronaven." Her voice, gently plaintive, was at variance with the resentment of the words. Her eyes were inimical.

"You will like my mother-in-law. She is a real lady!" the Master had laughed. James recognized the aptness of the gibe.

"I think," said he abruptly, rising as he spoke, "that you must allow me to go to my brother. You are perhaps not aware that he has sent for me."

The resentful eyes flashed so fierce a look at him that he obeyed them rather than the words:

"I must insist on your granting me a few moments' talk, Father MacIvor. It is on the subject of your brother's health that I wish to speak."

He sat down again.

"You are aware," she went on, "of the distressing circumstances which have occurred. It was my daughter who found her husband, in a state of syncope, in that room under the roof which is called, I believe, the old library. It was a very great shock to my daughter. She is anything but strong at present. She thought he was dead. It was a long time before he showed any sign of consciousness. Several hours, I believe. The medical man has endeavored to reassure her. But he has admitted to me, Father MacIvor, that he considers your brother's heart to be seriously affected."

James felt the cold tightening of the face which accompanies a sudden pallor.

"I am afraid that—" he began. But she interrupted him:

"I have asked Dr. Grigor if he had been already aware

of this state of things. Of course he answered me he had not. I suppose it would be considered unprofessional to make an admission of the kind. But if any of the family knew your brother had heart disease, I consider that we have been very badly treated. We ought to have been informed, Father MacIvor, and so I shall tell your sister, Lady Martindale, when I see her. Oh, I exonerate Rosalind, I exonerate the Duchess. She's a sweet woman. I believe her incapable of deception. But the Master himself——"

James had now colored hotly. He had scarcely ever felt more angry than he did this moment; at the same time he was fully conscious of the folly of anger in such a quarter.

"Ian has never had symptoms like this before, that I am aware of," he said. "We have always thought him a strong man. He was very ill with influenza last year, but got over it wonderfully."

"Oh, things are not at all what they ought to be," proceeded Mrs. Duvenant. "He was ill last year, you say? It was then the mischief began, probably. My girl had a right to expect a very different state of affairs. An only daughter, Father MacIvor! Not yet twenty. As I said to the doctor this morning, if it's a case of heart disease, all the Master's extraordinary restlessness is explained. I believe it goes with the complaint. Of course, in some ways, the alliance is a very satisfactory one. I have nothing to say against the position of your family, Father MacIvor, nor the manner in which your relations have received my Oenone. And this is a very fine old place. My daughter and I are taking quite a pleasure in doing

it up. I think you will agree that there are some improvements. But I feel very much upset, I can't deny it. My daughter's state of health—" she broke off and colored faintly—"Well, there are things I can hardly discuss with you—but we have given further and very extensive orders here for the winter, and I hardly feel justified in engaging myself to spend so much money until I see how things are going to turn out. I can't ask Duvenant for advice. I could not explain matters by cable, and—well, it's a very unpleasant position for a mother to be placed in, for I don't want my daughter to be distressed."

She began to tremble and fan herself, and tears rose to her eyes. The visitor looked at her steadily.

"I cannot quite follow you," he said. "Am I to understand that, because of my brother's illness, you and your daughter consider yourselves ill-used?"

"Well, Father MacIvor, things are not turning out at all as I expected," repeated the mother obstinately. "It is not likely that Mr. Duvenant and myself should wish our only child to be married to a complete invalid, is it? Besides, your brother has been very peculiar. Now, of course, I see it was his health. If he has heart disease, I don't really see how my daughter is going to put up with it. Pray let me continue, Father MacIvor! My daughter is young. She is very young. She is a considerable heiress. If Mr. Duvenant carries through his schemes successfully—Mr. Duvenant is a very able man, and I see no reason why he should not—my daughter will be one of the greatest heiresses that ever came over to this country. Ask yourself if this is what I ought

to expect for her. Is it not natural that I should desire——"

The priest was still looking straight at the speaker.

"Better value for your money," he said very quietly.

She stared at him for a moment and the quiver of suppressed excitement shook her again.

"I did not expect this coarseness," she exclaimed, "from a gentleman in your profession."

The other looked down. His face, except for a tell-tale hectic spot, was impassive.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "of course everyone has his own point of view."

"Quite so," she answered, as if this were a tribute to the justice of her argument. "I had every right to expect, and so had Mr. Duvenant, that our daughter should make one of the most brilliant matches in this country. We overlooked the divorce; neither Mr. Duvenant nor I are narrow-minded; and your brother had been very unfortunate, it would seem, in his first wife: her behavior was shocking, by all accounts—" She had a shudder, quite artificial this time. "We were content to overlook also the impoverishment of the estates. I am speaking quite frankly, Father MacIvor, but I am sure you will appreciate my sincerity. Mr. Duvenant is a very generous man; and I do not think that I have shown myself behind hand." Her glance once more complacently owned the room. "So much for Mr. Duvenant and myself. As for my daughter. Well, if any girl had a right to expect a good time, surely it was Oenone. This first year of marriage, well, even if all else had been as it ought to be, the poor child would now, as matters have turned out, be de-

barred from most of the social amusements a young woman looks forward to——"

Mrs. Duvenant was talking ever more rapidly, moving her jeweled hands in gesticulation. She now flashed fiery eyes upon the man who sat with interlocked hands, rigidly before her, still with lowered eyelids.

"Only the other day, my daughter said to me: 'I must have a real fling next year, to make up for this.' Let us say that your brother lives on a few years—a life of complete invalidhood. Oh, it is no use blinking the truth, it is all we can expect, and then it will be at the cost of avoiding every kind of emotion, fatigue or exertion—there's a nice prospect for a girl not yet twenty! But that's not all, Father MacIvor——"

It was obvious that Mrs. Duvenant's sense of injury was assuming intolerable proportions.

"But this is not all," she went on, her voice rising to strained pitch. "Kindly inform me, Father MacIvor, what would my daughter's position be, should her child prove to be only a girl?"

The priest made an abrupt movement. There was a startled horror in the glance which he cast upon the speaker.

"I don't quite follow you—" he stammered. "You mean?"

"I mean," said she between set teeth, "I mean, in the probable event of my daughter becoming a widow very shortly, would her child, if a girl, inherit the title and estates?"

James clasped his hands again so tightly that the knuckles started. Again he looked down.

"Not if the child were a girl," he answered.

"Not! Are you sure of this, Mr. MacIvor? I understood that in Scotland, the title frequently goes in the female line."

"Not if——"

"Not when," James hesitated painfully. Then he looked up and fixed her: "Not unless the male line is extinct."

"I don't understand," said the lady icily. "I don't understand. Who then would become Lord Stronaven?"

"Oh, Mrs. Duvenant, spare me. I had never thought such a thing possible. If my poor Ian died—God forbid!"

"Please answer my question, Mr. MacIvor."

The ferocity of her egoism, her complete callousness stung him. He got up.

"If my father's elder son were to die without a son, I should inherit."

"You!" She sprang up in her turn, all her studied suavities and dignities, all her perfect gentilities cast to the winds. The tone in which she cried the word made it an insult. "You!" They stood facing each other. "I consider that we've been shamefully treated!" she exclaimed.

It was upon this that the door opened. A slight figure in a trailing white velvet wrapper, entered the room, dragging little feet in high-heeled mules.

"Oenone!" cried the mother.

James saw Mrs. Duvenant's face change; love and anxiety leap into it; he heard the tender solicitude in her voice —a voice quite unrecognizable from those recent tones of acrimony.

"She has a heart—if it's only for her child," he said to

himself. And, repenting of his wrath: "Poor woman," he thought, "she, too, has to suffer in this sad business!"

"Ian's sleeping," said Oenone. "Rosalind tells me that Duncan won't let anyone near him. Is that Ian's brother?"

"This is Father MacIvor," said Mrs. Duvenant; and resentment was again audible in her accents.

"Oh, Father MacIvor!" the daughter echoed with a slight laugh, "I suppose I'd better call you James, hadn't I, since you are my brother-in-law."

She put out a slim warm hand; he felt his touch to be icy against it. Awkwardly he stood. Not a word could he bring forth.

"Please, Mummie," the girl—she looked nothing else—turned coaxingly. "I do want a little private talk with James. You won't mind going away and leaving us, will you, Mummie?" Then as Mrs. Duvenant hesitated, darkening ever more on the priest, Oenone's coaxing manner changed to pettishness. "Please, Mummie," she insisted and stamped a clapping slipper. "I must be alone for my talk with James."

"Well, dearie—Oh, well, dearie. . . . There, don't excite yourself. Father MacIvor, kindly remember she's had a dreadful day. She must be treated with the greatest consideration. I can't have her upset or distressed—she——"

"Oh, do go away, Mummie!"

CHAPTER V

THE moment the door had closed behind Mrs. Duvenant, Oenone turned and smiled at her brother-in-law. It was the smile of a child—confiding, mischievous. Then she flung herself down upon the sofa, drew up her feet, gathered the cushions about her and nestled into them with kittenish comfort-seeking movements; after which she smiled again.

"Do sit down, James," she said. "I hope you don't mind my being just in a rest gown, I'm so tired! I don't mind being kept awake the first half of the night, but if it's the other part, I'm done! I didn't get a wink of sleep after three. Do sit down. You don't mind my informal ways? I never had a brother. I'm an only child you know. But I've always thought it would be rather nice to have one—there's room on the sofa, isn't there? Oh, well, draw up the chair, you look pretty tired, too."

Her soft voice trickled on, sweet and unstirred by emotion as the subdued song of some little waking bird. James MacIvor had not spoken a word, and yet already he felt an odd kind of sympathy establishing itself between them.

"She doesn't care," Ian had said. "Not that!" snapping his fingers. The fact that she did not care was what made life endurable for the husband, who did care so passionately elsewhere. But that she should not betray the slightest feeling in the present circumstances struck the priest as a singular phenomenon. And it was still more

singular that he could find no resentment in his own mind against her for this indifference. He felt, indeed, even glad that it should be so; and when she made her little plaint of fatigue, he was sorry, as he would have been sorry for a child—or for something more irresponsible and helpless still: a fawn out of the woods, or any other soulless creature, which to see suffer is unbearable. It seemed to him infinitely pathetic that she should be the central point of the tragedy, the sweeping monstrous tragedy that had fallen upon the House of Stronaven.

"I am very glad you've come," she said, into his thoughts. "There are so many things I've got to say to you, I don't know where to begin. There isn't anybody else I can talk to. Mother? Well, poor Mother! Mother's rather upset, you see. It isn't—Oh there, you won't mind my saying it—it's not what she expected—" The listener could scarcely repress a smile, as the already familiar phrase struck his ear. "Of course, it isn't what I expected either—but then, what's the good of making a fuss?" She pushed a cushion more congenially to the hollow of her back. "And as I said to Mummie this morning, it isn't as if it were anything infectious. And the doctor says Ian will be up and about in a day or two. Ian says he'd really rather not anybody went away. We were going to 'do heads' for dinner tonight—dress up, you know. I suppose there's no reason why we shouldn't —if I'm not too tired?" She yawned.

Of course, the obvious answer from one sensible being to another in the circumstances, was "There's every reason why you should not do anything so heartless. Get rid of your house party at once and try and understand that the

shadow of death is over your house." But all that James said was: "Oh, I do hope you won't be too tired." And his eyes must have been very kind as he looked at her, for she gave him once more her pretty trustful smile, and told him she meant to dress her head like Greuze's "Laitière"; and that she thought it would be very becoming. "And the Duchess," she went on, "meant to go as some Lady Hamilton, whoever that might be. But now she says she won't be anything, because of Ian! She will sit on top of Ian all the time, and he doesn't want her a bit. He doesn't want any of us, you know."

She turned her limpid gaze upon the listener. "He just can't bear anyone in the room, only Duncan. You know Duncan, of course—he's the piper. Oh, yes—of course you do. Duncan's on the lookout for you, and I told him to run down here and tell us when the Master wakes."

She lit a cigarette, and parenthetically remarked that Mummie had never allowed her to smoke before she was married, so she had got one good thing out of it, anyway. "I used to eat sweets, you know," she added. "But a smoke is ever so much more comforting, don't you think? And sweets are bad for the teeth."

She gave him another vision of her own faultless row; and after a pause, asked, with the same unemotional directness:

"Do you like Rosalind?"

"I? Oh, I'm away from them all, so long— I——"

"You don't," she decided shrewdly, and added: "Neither do I. I can't bear her, and she hates me. She always did hate me. But Mother swears by her, of course, because she's a Duchess. It was she who really made up our mar-

riage. But Mummie still thinks her too sweet for words."

Mrs. MacIvor turned among her cushions, supported herself on her elbow and leaned forward, emphatically waving her cigarette. "She just did it you know, because she was so jealous of the other woman."

"What?" ejaculated James, startled beyond measure.

"Of the other one," repeated Oenone calmly. "Morna, you call her, don't you? That's an awfully pretty name—and that's just what I wanted to talk to you about."

"About Morna?"

"Yes—and Ian."

"Morna and Ian!"

"Yes—" nodding her head. "I daresay it seems pretty queer to you. But, as a matter of fact, this place is just haunted with Morna." She laughed a little. "I think I'm pretty well haunted by her myself. Think of her! The moment I crossed the threshold I began to think of her. I couldn't tell you why. I began to wonder about her. I wondered what she'd done it for, and all that, you know. That's why I like to have a lot of people about. It seems kind of silly to keep thinking about your husband's first wife—and a divorced one into the bargain! Do you know, before the people came, it got—well, I think it got regularly on my nerves. I felt—Oh—as if I couldn't rest till I'd seen her."

"Mrs.—Mrs. MacIvor!"

"Aren't you going to call me Oenone?"

"Oenone, Oh my dear child!"

"It seems to scare you a bit—I suppose it does strike you as funny. But I thought people were getting accus-

tomed to that sort of thing nowadays. They ought to—Oh, I forgot you're a Catholic. It doesn't matter anyhow. I thought first I was only just silly, run down, not being so very well." She sighed and looked away a moment, then resumed in her former delicate sprightly colloquial tones:

"But, it doesn't signify about me, really. I'm having quite a good time you know, and I never could see the use of fuming as Mummie does. But it's Ian."

The brother drew an oppressed breath. What was this astonishing child going to reveal now?

"When I married your brother, you see," she proceeded, "he—Oh, well!" She broke off, flung her half-smoked cigarette away, laughed, and resumed, altering her phrase:

"I suppose lots of men are like that. They want a thing dreadfully till they get it—and then they want something else."

"Oh!" James had a little gasp. She fixed him a moment with a smile.

"He wanted me," she said in rather drawling tones, "just madly. And ever since we've come up here, he's wanted—Morna. I suppose he's just that kind of man, unless——"

"Unless what?" James hardly knew what he was saying. How horrible all this was, and how impossible to meet!

"Unless he never wanted me at all—and only married me . . ."

"Speak your thoughts," he said. "You can trust me."

"Well, I am, am I not?" She laughed, but the color rose in her cheeks and she spoke hurriedly: "Unless he only

married me—Oh, just for the reason that the Duchess wanted him to so much——"

"What? What is that?"

"To spite Morna."

The priest dropped his face into his hands with a faint groan. That clear, child's gaze had become suddenly a misery to him.

"Don't you take on," the unstirred voice proceeded. "I don't feel so badly about it as all that comes to. I'm not so very romantic. And I don't know that it would have suited me to have anyone hanging round all the time, and just living on my smiles, and being jealous and all that kind of thing. And I'm having quite a good time. I don't see why I shouldn't go on having a good time. And if I brought the money, he's given me a very nice position—socially you know. I'm quite alive to its advantages, and I don't regret. Well, it wouldn't be any use regretting, anyhow. But I just keep thinking of Morna the whole time. I'm wild to know something about her."

Again she shifted herself on the cushions and leaned forward.

"James—" He looked up at her. "I don't know what made me get up last night and wander up in the Old Library. I suppose I had a kind of feeling. I hadn't heard Ian go into his room. Or maybe it's what's called telepathy—not that I believe in that kind of thing: there's always a natural explanation for everything, I think. I daresay it was just his fall that woke me; in the silence, you know, being in the same tower. Very likely it was that. Anyhow I jumped out of bed, and up to the Old

Library I went. I knew Ian had a fancy for sitting up there, alone, since the house party came. To get out of the way, I suppose. Anyhow, there he was lying on his face. There was a portrait—portrait of a woman propped up on a chair before him."

"My God! He found it then!"

"Yes—I suppose he did. It's hers I take it, Morna's?"

"Yes, Morna's."

There was a long silence. James did not dare turn his glance upon her. The delicate voice said:

"She's a real handsome woman. Not—not what you'd call stylish you know. But—Oh—yes—I liked her face. I think she's very handsome."

And as James still struggled with his sense of dumb hopelessness:

"I hid away the picture before I called them up. There wasn't any use in everyone else getting hold of it, was there? That horrid Duchess of yours—and poor Mummie."

The man got up quickly and came over to the sofa.

"That was good of you," he cried.

She smiled at him, with that engaging air of taking him unreservedly into her confidence.

"Oh, well," she said, "that's just how I felt."

She put out her hand and he pressed it. Thus was sealed the compact of friendship between perhaps the most dissimilar human beings on the face of this earth.

She drew her fingers quickly away. He saw that any approach to emotion was distasteful to her: she fluttered away from it as with a scared beat of wings. Her next words strengthened this impression:

"Oh, I don't want to talk about poor Ian's attack. Do sit down again, James. You look so tall, towering over me there. But I'll just say this. I wasn't altogether surprised to find it was Morna—I must call her Morna—he's been—well, it is hard to get the right word sometimes—I'll say, he's been just worrying about her. The very first night we came here—yes, I think it was then—I don't believe I had noticed anything queer before, not really—he was, Oh, dreadful! It seemed to come over him. Of course it was only natural, I suppose: brought it all back, you see. What with old Kirstie. . . . Oh, I was real glad to get rid of old Kirstie. She couldn't put up with me at all, no how. She thought my French maid was booked for—down below—for wearing a smart blouse—for tea, you know—cut in a point, just the fashion. And when it came to our playing cards on a Sunday—Oh, my goodness! Well, she's very comfortable in her cottage. And we're all much happier, I think."

She looked for an answer with bright eyes.

"No doubt it was wisest," said James.

"No—there's not a bit of doubt about it. That's been the mischief, not to be able to do it all round. It's just because we couldn't have everything new, and start fresh right off, that things have gone wrong. Oh, well!"

There was a world of philosophy in the tone with which her favorite ejaculation escaped her each time.

"One can't expect that, especially when it's the case of an old castle and retainers and all the rest of it. But the minute we came back here, Ian started being—a bit mad, I think. Now, don't you imagine he's been anything but real courteous to me. Too polite, I'd think sometimes.

He'd do anything he could to keep me cheerful, in the way of letting me have everything I want, don't you know, and have Mummie, and fill the house, and order—Oh, I could order anything in the whole world I'd like. And he'd want to pay for it, too. He's generous. And he'd let me pull the whole of this old house to pieces and build it up again, and never so much as have a crooked look at me. But the first night—I heard him groaning next door. I thought he had nightmare." She laughed. "And I got out of bed, and was going to wake him. When I came to the door I heard him talking out loud. He was saying, Morna . . . Morna . . . Morna! I got back to bed, and I did feel bad, somehow. Not for myself—I don't seem to take it that way—but for him, poor fellow! It did sound so awful."

She shook herself slightly, as though to cast off the impression; and with nervous movements busied herself upon another cigarette. James sat, watching her, his eyes full of dumb misery. The pity of it! She laughed again tremulously. He saw how the tears rose and how she drove them back.

"I rather think," she went on with a catching breath, "I'm a bit young to be married yet. I ought to have waited. I would have had a far better time. And it would have been better for him, too—Oh, well. What's the use? But I'm real glad to have been able to have this nice talk with you. You've been a perfect comfort to me, James. You and I get on first-rate, anyhow."

He was conscious of having scarcely said half a dozen words, yet he was conscious, too, of the pathetic understanding between them. There came a knock at the door.

"That's Duncan," she said, and jumped off the sofa, dropping one of her absurd slippers as she did so. She thrust her little silk-stockinged foot back into it and her coaxing smile invited James to regard the incident humorously.

CHAPTER VI

DUNCAN jerked a hand toward his sandy head, muttered "Mr. James," and started straight ahead up the winding stairs, with quick strides that left the priest far behind.

He stood waiting, motionless, on the landing, looking like some rough-hewn, rudely tinted statue of granite; short and thick-set, his long arms hanging stiffly by his side, his finger-tips reaching to the knees. As James, panting, rejoined him, he started off again, thrusting back a swing-door. But an ejaculation of surprise arrested him.

When the lad had first given him the lead to mount, James had expected to find his brother still in the upper library, the place where he had fallen.

"Duncan," he exclaimed, "where are you taking me to? Surely not that way?"

The man wheeled round, kilt swinging.

"The Master wouldna' rest till he was brocht down, Mr. James."

The honest glance was fixed a moment on Father MacIvor's face, and then was shifted quickly. The priest knew that he was betraying the emotion he felt, and appreciated the simple creature's delicacy of mind.

"He's in the old rooms, then," he said, himself pushing forward.

"Aye. Will I bide here, Mr. James? I'd be within call gin ye were wanting me; and I'll no let onybody in upon ye."

It was through this door that the ancient part of the castle was entered. The passage led to the east wing, and it was that which Morna and Ian had chiefly occupied. Here, the Duvenant hand had been stayed. The hothouse air and the scent affected by the exotic taste of the Argentines, the color and upholstering, all had vanished. It was the old, cold austerity of atmosphere and surrounding which enveloped James and his companion. They left the modern world behind them, and returned into the past.

James had to pause a moment at the door before he could summon courage to enter. To find his brother in those rooms—the rooms that had been once sacred to his married life—and afterwards laid waste by his own hand, filled him with forebodings more painful than ever. It had come to him with a swift pang that Ian would never have gone back there had he not felt himself that his days were numbered. It was an abandonment of the whole deliberately planned scheme of his new existence. Well, was not death best here? Father MacIvor pulled himself together and softly opened the door. His first glance at his brother's face fulfilled his forebodings.

The impression, however, passed quickly when the Master turned his head and smiled, and his eyes lit up. Why limit God's power, said the priest to himself, who tried to measure every thought by the divine standard. Was it not a want of faith to think of death as the only solution?

Ian, propped against the purple cushions, with the purple and silver coverlet thrown across him, wrapped in a fur coat, the collar of which rose behind his pale bearded face, looked, the brother thought, singularly beautiful. Amid the sumptuous stuffs once devised as a setting for Morna, the bold features, refined and sharpened by suffering, seemed as if they had been carved out of old ivory.

For a minute of unspoken communion the two remained silent; brother gazing on brother, and to James it seemed suddenly as if Morna were there between them. To his nostrils rose the elusive fragrance which had always been significant of her presence.

Involuntarily he inhaled it deeply, and the Master said: "Ghosts, ghosts, Jimmy!" and sighed. His voice was weak and the sigh was one of physical oppression. It was only in the eyes that life burned undimmed. "Sit down, man," he went on in an irritable whisper, "and don't look at me like that." Then he added, shifting himself as if to ease the labored breath: "I'm sick of being looked at. You should have seen my mother-in-law's face this morning. 'This is not what I expected of you!' was written all over it."

A laugh shook him. The sick man's senses had become unnaturally acute, thought James. It was the very phrase that had been repeated *ad nauseam* into his own ears.

"And Rosalind," said the Master. "I had to drive her away, 'pon honor. She wanted to play the bedside angel gloating over me and my interesting heart. Never enjoyed herself in her life so much, really. Her eyes—Jove, she has the soul of a vivisector! She thinks I'll die of it

. . . and she knows why! And wouldn't she sit by my pillow and watch the gasps and enjoy every one? Double stroke of luck, you see, a score off Morna, and the fun of my agony."

"Oh, no . . . no!" cried the priest shocked. "Ianny, dear fellow, don't talk like that!"

"Well, then, don't let any of them in on me again," the Master cried. "That Duvenant cat tells me she's wired for Milly. Let Milly and Rosalind fight it out between them. I won't have Milly here." Again laughter seized him. He panted and coughed. "Give me a chance. James—" he shot out his thin hand and caught his brother's wrists. "And you, you've got to do something for me—that's why I sent for you. You've got to find her."

"Find her!" ejaculated James.

"You've got to find her," repeated the Master. "It's the one thing in the world you can do for me. I am a stricken man, and besides, you know, I am in honor bound."

James sat silent. "Look here, Jimmy, I'm not asking anything so very difficult. Aren't you Roman fellows leagued together all over the world? Haven't you all got a regular system for spying into other people's family affairs? There, never mind," as the priest made a hurt movement of withdrawal—"never mind that. Track him, him, him, somehow, anyhow! An artist of his standing is easy to trace. Why the first picture dealer will put you on the way. . . ."

He paused and for the moment a silence lay like lead between them. Ian turned his head toward the window

again; James saw the strained nostril, the drawn lips. It seemed to him as if not one of these struggling breaths relieved the oppression; but the indomitable will triumphed. The Master went on: "You've got to find out if she's with him. You've got to see her. You've got to tell her about me. You've got to come back quickly and tell me about her—perhaps bring me a message! Funny thing, I thought last night there was nothing I wanted so much as death, and now that I've looked it in the face—I was quite glad when old Grigor told me nobody need order my coffin yet—no reason why I shouldn't live for years. Fellows he's known, he says, have died of something else in the end. Of course it means being an invalid. But to go off—out like that alone— It comes to this, old man. Either there isn't anything beyond, and then I'd be a fool not to have hung on, just on the chance—don't ask me what of. I know it's mad—but anyhow Morna and I are both on this earth. . . . Or else there is a beyond. Well, then, Morna and I have got to be there together, somehow. And we shouldn't have been if I'd died last night. No, don't say anything, Jimmy. I don't want parson's talk at me, I want you to understand—yes, you do, I know, good old Jimmy."

He sank back on his pillows.

"I got them to bring me back here, you see. The place is full of her, even now." He made a gesture, indicating the purple brocades about him, the restored hangings, and the door, half-open, that led to the turret room. "I couldn't stand the other side. To have to be there and hear those—those voices, Jimmy; they're like voices talking at a railway station. You know how one's longing for

the train to move on. And the beastly colors and stuffs, and that scent! I'd have gone mad!"

A quiver ran through him and his eyes rolled with a gleam of mingled fury and terror; James was reminded of a thorough-bred horse stung by gadflies.

"Well, I'm here again, anyhow," said the Master, presently, "and it's like getting out of hell and into—call it limbo. A nice theological region for you, Father James. Ghosts—that's all that is left to me."

He repeated the words in a tone of indescribable melancholy; and then added, so low that the other had to bend forward to listen:

"Did anyone tell you—I found the picture?" The Master colored darkly; his countenance terrified his brother. "James—when I saw her face again! She looked at me, Oh, my God, I never saw her look like that! James, it came upon me . . . that man! that was what he had made of her! Concini! Morna with that agony in her eyes, Morna the prey of a devil! I wanted to tear her out of the picture——"

He choked, wrestling for breath, and turned livid. James sprang to his feet, but the sick man impatiently waived him back.

"I can't bear anyone hanging over me!" he gasped. Sit down." Then, in a whisper: "Hide away the picture, Jimmy—hide it away. Those others——"

James spoke quickly:

"Oenone has done that already. She went to look for you, in the night, you know. She hid it away so that no one else should know. She has done that for you, she told me so."

The Master was lying back with closed eyes. The spasm was over; and the shallow breathing came with more ease. After a pause he said:

"That was very thoughtful of her."

James detected irony in his brother's voice.

"She's a good child, Ian," he said, rebukingly. But Ian was beyond emotion outside the circle of his own absorbing passion; he echoed his brother's words indifferently: "She's a good child—" and added: "She hasn't come to stare at me like the others, I'll say that for her. There's no humbug about her—Jimmy, how soon can you start? Can you go today?"

"I suppose I can," said Father MacIvor slowly.

"Go today, then—remember I'm waiting—I'll do all the doctor says. I'll lie on the flat of my back and let my thoughts gnaw at me instead of trying to run away from them—if that will help. Oh, I can't die till I know, anyhow!" Again he was silent, again gathered his strength together with an effort written in livid patches about his nostrils and in the open-mouthed struggle for breath. "If she's with him still . . ."

"If she were with him," cried James earnestly, "you may be sure I'd not rest till—" He broke off. "Oh, Ianny, it's madness to talk of such a thing. Morna may have—we are all liable to fall . . . but to remain in it, no, no, not that—not Morna!"

Ian closed his eyes. A look of greater serenity came over his face. "I must know, though," he said, as if to himself. And then fluttering with his hands: "Go, Jimmy, go."

Duncan was still at his post, inside the swing-door. He

turned anxious questioning eyes as Father MacIvor came toward him. The priest slightly shook his head.

"The Master's very ill, lad. You'll let no one in save such as he bids you."

The piper set his jaws like a fierce dog.

"Trust me, Mr. James." Then he lifted his hand to his breast. "I'm wae!" he said and turned abruptly back down the passage, toward his master's room.

"I'm wae"—the words summed up all that James felt himself as he slowly descended the winding stairs, flight after flight, toward the hall. He would have liked to have gone quietly out of the castle, but feared that more was demanded of him. Ought he not to see Oenone again? And if Millicent had arrived, he must interchange a few words with her, were it only to prevent her from trying to force her way upon Ian.

As it chanced, Mrs. Duvenant and Lady Martindale were actually coming upstairs as he approached the lowest landing. Millicent's loud voice rang up in protestation as she advanced.

"Oh, dear—what? Impossible! Heart—did you say? Heart? Why should Ian's heart be bad? Nonsense, I don't believe it! Ian with a heart? What do you say? Faint? Was he faint? Oh, anybody's would do that. What? Indigestion, of course! Theophilus is awfully queer with it sometimes. Why, Ian's the strongest of us all. Such a sportsman! How could he have shot all those lions if his heart had been bad? What do you say? You ought to have been told? Told what? There wasn't anything to tell——"

She had, apparently, paused for breath. Mrs. Duve-

nant found her opportunity. Her tones were raised to a sharpness seldom heard in them.

"I am sorry, Lady Martindale, I am sorry to say that there is no possible mistake. Your brother is very seriously, very dangerously ill. The doctor has not diagnosed indigestion." She laughed acidly. "It is quite impossible—I can, at least, scarcely believe it possible—that you all, that he himself could not have known. It is not what I expected for my daughter . . . for my poor Nonny."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense! How could he know, if it hadn't come on then? How could any of us know?—I don't believe it anyway!"

They were quite close now. Lady Martindale must have stopped to fling back that last denial. Mrs. Duvenant's voice floated up again, more edged with acerbity than before.

"Certainly, Lady Martindale, I should be sorry to doubt anything you said. But there is no doubt—" the bitter laugh ran quivering through the words—"that you all hurried on the marriage in a very remarkable way. A very remarkable way!"

"Wha-at! Oh, what do you say? Nonsense, preposterous! I never heard of such a thing. Quite ridiculous!" Millicent screamed as she clambered furiously up the four remaining steps and almost fell, headlong, against her brother. "Good gracious, James? Fancy your being here! Oh, James, I am glad to see you—somebody at last who is not quite mad!"

"Hush, hush, Milly!" rebuked he. This open wrangling over the sick man in his own house was horrible. "Do

be quiet, dear, a minute," he went on, as the irrepressible Lady Martindale gave symptoms of breaking forth again. He turned to Mrs. Duvenant who stood, panting and inimical, under the archway of the landing. "Is there any room," he asked, "where I can have a few minutes' private talk with my sister?"

"Oh, you can go into poor Nonny's boudoir, if you like," said Mrs. Duvenant, in tones that matched her glance. I told my poor child to go and lie down again, and see if she can get an hour of sleep, Lady Martindale. She has had a terrible night and I found her quite exhausted after that long conversation with you, Mr. MacIvor. It was very agitating for her. And, in the circumstances—it seems to me, nobody's any feeling at all for my poor child, in her state of health, and the dreadful blow that's come upon her, and she not yet twenty!"

A sob caught her by the throat. She hurried past the two with her handkerchief to her lips, and up the winding stairs beyond them. Disjointed phrases escaped her as she went. "And a house-full of people—the Keith-Stirlings coming to dine tonight—and——"

Millicent, her brother's compelling hand on her arm, remained staring open-mouthed.

"My goodness!" she ejaculated, "I'm sure! Aren't people odd? I never did like that woman, what? No breeding, Jimmy—of course one couldn't have expected that. What? What do you say, dear boy? Come in and talk? Oh yes—yes. Did you ever see anything like the stairs? Carpets like a new hotel! What! And, Oh dear—this used to be my room— What have they done to it? Jimmy, what on earth is it like? It's lacquer! And a

black carpet! Gracious goodness! It's a Poiret room! A Poiret room at Stronaven! What do you say? Don't I want to hear about Ian? Of course I do. How silly you are!" Her eager jovial face strove to assume the air of gravity demanded by the circumstances; but her indomitable optimism returned to the surface.

"He is not really ill, is he, Jimmy? Just Mrs. Duvenant's fuss. What? I suppose the fact is he's bored to death. They're all too much for him, poor boy! He'd better go and shoot lions again for a change."

"Shoot lions . . . ! My dear Milly——"

His look and tone frightened her. Her mouth took the piteous droop of a child about to cry.

"Yes, he's very ill," he said as if in answer. "Very ill—his heart is affected. The very best must mean an invalid life. For the present, the only thing for him is absolute quiet. He can see no one—no one," repeated James firmly.

But Millicent had no desire to see Ian. She shrank from the very thought of it.

"Oh dear, Oh dear," she ejaculated. The tears had sprung to her eyes. But she was unmistakably relieved by James' last words.

"Of course, Jimmy, dear, I quite understand," she exclaimed with great alacrity. "He must be quiet, poor fellow. I quite understand. I shouldn't dream of opposing doctor's orders! What! So silly ever to oppose doctor's orders! Don't you think I'd better go right away this afternoon—back to the Munros? Can't do any good here—only in the way. Much the kindest thing to go. 'Tisn't as if I could do any good. After lunch, of course.

They'll give me a bit of lunch, I suppose? Must be close on lunch-time now, I should think. We'd better go down. What? No? Well, good-bye, dear boy. Good-bye. You'll let me know about poor dear Ian. Not that I can believe he's so bad. Lots of people have something wrong with their heart—lots of people."

She was hurrying to the door when, upon a sudden thought, she wheeled round, her countenance once more beaming.

"How silly of us! Of course he'll go to Nauheim. Make him quite all right—Nauheim, next June. Nobody worries about hearts, now, since Nauheim's been invented. Good gracious, Jimmy—" she poked at one of the panels with a plump finger. "It's like a tea-tray—a Japanese tea-tray!"

The door was banged. She was gone.

James stood staring after her, unable to find a word. It is always difficult for a deep nature to understand a light one. It was impossible not to see that her one desire was to get away, to avoid the smallest further unpleasant emotion. She would not even put another question concerning her brother's health, lest the answer should prove disturbing. He sighed, and yet was relieved, too; he had anticipated a battle royal.

Apparently also he was not expected to see Oenone again—there only remained Rosalind.

It was an ungracious task to have to tell this exalted lady whom, cousin as he was, he had always secretly distrusted, that the patient did not wish for her presence in his room any more. But the charge had been laid upon him. He wondered how he could best get into communi-

cation with her, in a house where he felt himself not only a mere visitor but an intrusive one. He scarce liked to take upon himself to summon any of the supercilious servants who matched the new furniture.

As he paused, uncertain, in the middle of the lacquered room, Rosalind Monmouth entered. She closed the door softly behind her.

"I've only just heard that you were here, James," she said, holding out her hand. "Oh, I'm glad, I'm very glad that you have come."

She had a naturally low voice, with a kind of chord in it. It was the exact voice with which to express sympathy and sorrow. Her appearance, too, seemed very discreetly attuned to the shadow which hung over this roof. She wore garments of extreme simplicity and of a somber purple hue. Her hat was hung about with a long purple veil that framed her pale face and threw into strong relief the banded masses of her auburn hair.

The priest wondered whether she had deliberately attired herself in those subtle mourning tints—then he remembered the purples of Morna's rooms, and wondered more. It was in Rosalind's character, he reflected, to be forever challenging attention. She wished to be the center. It was for this reason that she had always had an envious jealousy of Morna. He gazed at her without speaking as he drew his chilled fingers from her grasp. He saw that she wanted to expand, to be emotional; and every fiber in his being recoiled in sensitive distaste. Rather, a thousand times, Milly's frank egotism!

"Dear James," she went on, "to you I can open my

heart. Ian is doomed unless we do something for him. Sit here, will you not, beside me? Oh, poor fellow!"

The tears welled up into her wonderful brown eyes, but remained artistically unshed between the black lashes. A shaft of the autumn sunshine caught the fine oval of her cheek; and he saw, unwillingly, the texture of its artificial whitening and the darker roots of the Titian colored hair. He took a chair opposite to her; and, dropping his worn hands between his knees, looked down at the eccentric roses on the black carpet.

She stopped, flung an impatient glance at him, how ugly he was, she thought, and how awkward! How could this be Ian's brother? The thought brought her back to the sick man, and the rich melancholy welled out again:

"Oh, James, the pity of it! Such a splendid fellow, so handsome, such a sportsman!" She bent forward: "James—" her gaze and accent compelled him to raise his eyes; and then her own enveloped him with a kind of greed. "Of course, you and I know the truth, the hidden meaning of this. We know it is all mental. It is Morna's doing. He's dying of it, of his passion for her. And—Oh, if a man feels like that, it must be torture to be married to another woman. I see that now."

The gusto in her glance, the shaded sadness in her voice revolted the listener. How accurately Ian had gauged her! James had never known quite why he had disliked and distrusted this woman; Ian had given him the key of the riddle: "The soul of a vivisector . . ."

"It is a pity," he said dryly, "that those who pushed Ian on this disastrous road did not pause to think before."

She shot at him, through narrowed lids, a glance full of

secret anger. Her voice, however, continued silky, as, with a smile which disdainfully lifted one corner of her beautiful mouth, she said:

"Poor Milly—she's so impetuous! And Ian himself——"

James looked down again at the carpet. There came a pause. The Duchess moved restlessly among the cushions. Then, with an impatient sigh and accents of labored forbearance she exclaimed:

"Well, do not let us waste time on futile regrets, dear James. Let us think what can be done now. What I came to talk to you about is the vital question of what we can do for Ian. Something must be done. These people will kill him."

"These people?"

"That awful Duvenant woman and—Oh, yes, you know it as well as I—the poor tiresome little doll!"

"You mean . . . ?" said James. He was looking steadily at her once more. Those deep luminous eyes in the pale, angular face, searching and finding: "you mean the wife that you and Milly gave him?"

"I—!" She subdued the rise of temper. With sweet-voiced insolence she proceeded: "Why, dear James, do you call her wife?"

He had a scarcely perceptible smile, and made a faint gesture as if dismissing the triviality.

"You were going to suggest something."

"I was going to suggest," said the Duchess, and for the first time her tone was frankly hard, "what anyone with a little common-sense would suggest, that these women, these Duvenants, with their grievances and their houseful of idiot

guests—they've all been pressed to remain, would you believe it?—and the dinner party tonight hasn't even been put off—Oenone thought she'd feel able to come down; she says she's got a lovely gown——"

The Duchess laughed, her beautiful lips curling back in an open sneer.

"You were going to suggest—" James' grave voice reminded her once again.

Fury shot at him through the contracted eyelids.

"I was going to suggest that Ian hasn't a chance of life with them. I can do anything with that Duvenant woman. I'll make her take Oenone abroad somewhere. They'll be glad enough to get away from the bother and flaunt their little rags of fashion at Monte Carlo, or anywhere. We must get a specialist for Ian—the very best—and nurses. And there must be someone in the house—I will —" her voice sank back to its mellifluous strain—"I will give up everything and anything. Monmouth will understand. He knows I love Ian like a sister."

James waited till she had finished. Then—for it was not easy—the blood mounted to his forehead. But he kept a straight gaze upon her:

"I don't think any of your suggestions are practical, cousin Rosalind. As for yourself, do not think of remaining here for Ian's sake. He has just told me——"

"What?" The word rang out stridently.

"That he will see no one."

"That he will not see me? Did he mention me?"

"He mentioned you, and Millicent, and Mrs. Duvenant."

The Duchess rose. She was laughing.

"Thank you, James—thank you, that is quite enough.

I am in charming company. Is Oenone also of it, if I may inquire?"

"No."

"No? Dear me, how touching! He wants her to smooth his pillows, I suppose," she mocked him with the outrageousness of the idea.

"No," he repeated sharply; and then went on slowly: "Ian said Oenone had not come to stare at him, and he was thankful."

The Duchess laughed louder.

"You really are all too droll! He's grateful to her for keeping away—and the way you say it! It's delicious, James. I can't help seeing the humor of things, sad as it all is. You, of course, can't. You never could, could you, James? Well, Ian shall be grateful to me, too—tell him that. I'll be off this afternoon. The Duvenants won't have me for their dinner party. I'll tell Mrs. Duvenant I've that much decency; I can't feast in the house of a dying man."

She walked to the door, as if suddenly oblivious of his presence. But she turned to speak again from the threshold:

"You accept the responsibility, remember." Then the narrow glance swept him from head to foot. Her smile curved—that exquisite jocund and cruel smile of the Duchess of Monmouth. "I'm taking your word for all this, you see, but haven't you Romans an adage: the end justifies the means? You think, I suppose, you'll have your own way with poor Ian now!"

Looking after her, the priest realized that he had mortally offended her; he did not realize that he had just

inflicted upon her what was perhaps the deepest humiliation of her life. He sighed. How clumsy he always was, and how stupid! "I am an unprofitable servant," he said, and thought of his poor parish with a sense of comfort. How wise was the dispensation that had drawn him where his uncouth ways did not matter!

He waited a while longer, hoping to be able to get out of the castle unnoticed at the lunch hour, now that there was no more that he could do. He had a longing to be gone from the familiar surroundings grown so weirdly unfamiliar to him; out of this atmosphere of scent and cigarette smoke; out of these bedaubed unnaturally warm rooms; he who had so loved his home could not endure the spectacle of it thus vulgarized. It was like seeing a beloved face, once venerable and beautiful, now painted into false juvenility.

But there was yet a duty for him to accomplish before departing; a pious, almost a filial duty. He must visit Kirstie.

He went down the stairs into the hall, relieved to find it empty. But as he sought his shabby overcoat and hat on the oak table, the same young man who had popped in and out in the library came strolling in from the terrace, the eternal cigarette dear to his kind between his lips. He stood a moment, his hands thrust deep into his coat pockets—the cigarette zigzagging as he moved his mouth with humorous grimace. His prominent eyes followed the rusty figure as it hurried past him toward the door.

When quick steps without announced the priest's departure, Oenone's guest removed his cigarette to deliver

himself of a remark: "Rummy old blighter!" And catching sight of a footman in the far distance with a dish: "Luncheon? Loud cheers!" he ejaculated, and hurried toward the dining-room with a gait that seemed as if every limb were loose in its socket.

Mistress MacVurish was in the Old Gate cottage—so a stray garden-boy had informed James. The young woman who answered his rap, brightened at the sight of him. She was Kirstie's niece. She kept him a moment in the little patch of garden, bright with marigolds, while she talked in the soft Highland voice which seems always faintly toned for complaint.

"Ye'll find her sair changed, Mr. James," she said, when she returned. "Whiles she'll be wandering altogether, puir old body—she never thocht to leave you, nae mair than if she'd been ane of the auld stanes, till the Lord Himself called her away. Whiles she has been distrackit; for it's putting on her bonnet and shawl to go back up there, she'll be the hale day lang and it's unco' wroth she'll be with me for keeping her. 'I maun to my wark,' she'll say —'I've paid ye an ower lang visit, Jessie!' Hech, puir soul, her wark's well over for this world. 'Twas the wrench, ye see, Mr. James. Ye canna pull an auld tree up like that. But whiles she's quiet enough, just sittin' there by the hearth wi' her hand on the book, the wonder of it, Mr. James, she'll read a text, wi' her horn spectacles she can read a bit still, and she'll say: 'Jessie, there are wonderful things in this book—'tis a grand book, Jessie,' just as if it was all new to her; she that knew it all by heart from cover to cover—maun I prepare her for

ye, Mr. James—Hech, na need, sir. She's past that. Will ye be pleased to walk in?"

James found the old woman by the fire much as she had been described to him. The worn black-brown Bible was open on the table, and her glasses lay between its open pages, the broad print of which seemed curiously distinct in the dim light. The text leaped up to the priest's eyes:

> I have seen the foolish taking root; but suddenly
> I cursed his habitation.

Kirstie turned her gaunt white face with its tremulous mouth, questioningly toward him, fixing him with eyes which burned still vividly in their deep sockets. But that gaze had no recognition in it, he thought. He drew the three-legged stool toward her and sat down.

"Don't you know me, Kirstie?"

The gaze seemed to be going through him and past him.

"Where's her Leddyship? Is she na coming in?"

"Her Ladyship," James repeated the words blankly.

Jessie twitched his sleeve. "Pay no heed, Mr. James," she whispered, " 'tis your ain mither she'll be thinking on. Whiles she'll be gaein' far back that away."

He felt a mysterious sense of chill. . . . His own mother!

"She cam' in to me last night," went on the old woman, "when the pipes were skirlin' the reels."

"Whisht," interrupted the girl anxiously. "Ye'll get nae gude of her today, Mr. James. Ye'll maybe be lookin' in again anither time——"

He imposed silence with a gesture. Kirstie was still speaking; he wanted to hear. "And her Leddyship said—she said: 'Tell Duncan,' she says, 'na to be piping reels for Stronaven. Tell him it's the coronach he suld be playin'.'"

This was what James MacIvor took back with him that day from his home. With tormenting pictures of its disfigured walls; of its stricken master; of Mrs. Duvenant's inimical eyes, of Rosalind's taunting smile; of Oenone's child face; the reek of scent and cigarette, the echoes of racket, frivolity and callousness, and Duncan's words, "I'm wae!" This the culminating impression. The faithful servant driven out in her old age, and broken by the wrench. And the mystic warning from that soul wandering on the confines of life, troubled between past and present—"'Tis the coronach he suld be playin'!"

CHAPTER VII

RESISTING the offer to take a seat in the brand-new hotel omnibus, James MacIvor started to climb the steep road that led from the station to the oddly perched, scattered cluster of houses which calls itself Santa Maddalena.

The sun was blazing; the waters of the Mediterranean lay sparkling with the colors of sapphires. The road spread, winding upward, skirting the giant rocks, which here have nothing of grandeur, but rise, deep-hued and verdant, from the caress of the waves, as if to show how

Italy can clothe even ruggedness with luxuriance of springing life, and wreathe her very sea cliffs with flower-decked verdure. Palm, orange, aloes, fuchsia, intergrown, thrusting bold limbs out into the giddy space—the whole place was like some great garden breaking bounds in its luxuriance, till it seems as if it would leap into the precipice.

When he had left England the autumn changes had set in; early October winds blew already winter blasts, and drifting rains saddened the world's face. Here the vigorous life of the year appeared still in its fulness; color rioted; blue of sky and of sea, red and yellow and amber of rock, wonderful sappy green of aloe and orange grove, gold, scarlet and crimson of turning leafage; each gay house fresh bedaubed in rose or ocher; here and there a group of chrysoprase hued tiled roofs.

As the traveler toiled upwards, through the dust of the road—blinding white—he thought: "What a place to be happy in!" and his own sad heart sank more heavily yet. He wondered why Morna should have chosen just this spot. How could she bear it? To him it was like hearing dance music from the side of a deathbed.

A small *osteria* thrust its garden palings hung with purpling vine over the shoulder of the hill he was circling. A steep flight of steps cut in the rock, led up to it. He paused on a sudden thought; he would put up there rather than in the smart new hotel, which with the few villas made Santa Maddalena. No likelihood of meeting any inquisitive compatriots here, and the simplicity, the roughness even, would be congenial.

The people were kindly, and made him welcome. Their

best bedroom—it was at the top of the house, and you went up to it from outside by a guileless wooden staircase —was at his disposal. "One has a view from up there," said the hostess and kissed her sun-burnt hand with outflung gesture. Under the other arm she held a year-old, strapping infant, with cheeks like nectarines and serious eyes black as sloes; it might have been a Bellini model.

In his rather halting Italian, James MacIvor concluded the bargain. She was proud to have an Englishman, and him a priest, in her house; she had thought Inglesi were all heretics. He then asked if she knew the Casa Benedetto. She nodded violently. Know it—the *casa* where the English lady lived all alone all these months! She accompanied him into the tangled bit of garden to point out the way. And as he set off again along the dusty white road, she called after him gaily from the top of the steps that the *pranzo* would be ready at one and that there would be a *risotto* with chicken livers. The Casa Benedetto was pink. It stood a little beyond the church, toward the sea, after the lemon grove. The *padre* could not miss it.

He had not very far to go, as she had said, before the winding road brought him to the level, and the squat outline of the church revealed itself, standing in an open space of ground.

As he drew near he saw the remnants of an old fresco on the spandril over the porch—some tender warmth of color still remained and enough of gracious outline to reveal the subject, "The Flight into Egypt." The Virgin Mother sat on the ass, an immense straw hat shading her bent head.

James had not meant to linger upon his errand, but he could not pass the church without going in. And he was glad to do so—for many reasons. Now that it had come to the point he felt his courage suddenly fail; he shrank from what could only be an interview of extraordinary painfulness; shrank from the mere sight of her, whom he had last beheld as Ian's radiant wife. He was tired, too, after his long journeys, and had a more than usual sense of his own limitations. He would go in and rest a while, and seek strength and guidance. It would be cool there, and it would be dim; it would be silent. And One was there Who could not fail him. He pushed the heavy leather curtain and passed in.

It was a bare, poor place, full of shadows; the scent of incense hung in the still air; there were faded frescoes on the stone walls, and garish altars with highly colored statues and bristling artificial flowers. Yellow curtains were drawn over the small round windows on each side. The high altar seemed to be of great antiquity. As he went slowly up the aisle, there opened out upon him a side chapel that glowed with such a richness of color and beauty that it was as if some dark wonderful flower had suddenly bloomed to his gaze. It could not have dated later than the fifteenth century, and had belonged evidently to some ancient noble family of the district. On one side stood a tomb of yellowing marble rarely carved and surmounted by a recumbent figure. The figure lay with its feet toward the body of the church, so that the head, slightly turned on its cushion, seemed to be looking at the altar.

James took a chair from the pile built up against a

pillar, and knelt down—it was hardly so much to pray as to think out his anguish before the sanctuary. To him the mere sight of the tabernacle brought a sense of peace.

He had gone on his present errand for a twofold reason: to satisfy the urging of his own conscience as well as his brother's longing. From the moment when Ian had asked him on the moor: "Have you heard anything of her?" he had not ceased reproaching himself for his apathy in the matter. And it had been quite easy to trace her—as Ian had said.

Paolo Concini was living in Paris. He seemed to be in successful circumstances, for he had a house with a large studio and a garden at Neuilly. Artists are accustomed to strangers walking in upon them; and James had taken the elementary precautions neither to write nor to send in his name. The interview had been brief, and the priest came forth from it in a bewildered and complex frame of mind.

The mystery had deepened. The problem seemed more than ever difficult to solve. All through the long journey from Paris to Genoa his brain had revolved, day and night, round it, until it seemed as if, through sheer weariness, the power of thought had stopped. He sat now, staring at the altar, not praying in any set words, hardly even reflecting, but just setting himself and his inabilities, his difficulties, his weakness, his anguish before the tabernacle, while vivid pictures formed themselves outside his volition.

He saw the long studio, warm in color and atmosphere against the gray drizzle, which was making even Paris dreary; the young artist, as he came forward, smiling in-

quiringly; then the stare on the dark face, the frown, and the fierce sudden hostility. Again the cry rang in his ears:

"What do you want with me?" And then the outburst:

"What do you want with her?"

James only vaguely remembered how he had answered. Everything had been so inexpressibly difficult and the terror of finding himself wrong after all in his estimate of Morna, now that he had come to close quarters with the man who had taken her away, had suddenly overcome him.

"I want to see her . . . I ought to have come before—I—" It was in reaction against his doubts that this last phrase had escaped him. "I do not expect to find her with you, sir."

"You do not expect to find her with me," Concini had cried in a loud voice, "and why, then—" The tone had been as enigmatic as the fierce flash of the black eyes.

James remembered now that he had nevertheless spoken firmly: "Because I know her too well." The artist had stared, then had begun to walk up and down the room, now and then a passionate gesture escaping him. He had struck his forehead, bitten his thumb; a man of such swift and varying moods James thought he had never seen; and these moods all written in vivid expression upon the handsome face. Here was an instrument strung to highest pitch, ready to be played upon by all the emotions of life. This energy and impulsiveness might well lead to extremes of good or evil.

The priest's heart had sunk. Morna had ever been impulsive too, and romantic. Suddenly Concini had wheeled and come almost running the length of the room toward his visitor.

Now, in the silence and dimness of the incense-haunted church, James recalled that moment of exquisite relief: the strong, warm clutch on his cold hands; the young face, rich-colored even in that livid light, thrust close to his, quivering with emotion; the voice that had resounded in his ears, deep and yet almost boyish in its earnestness; the Italianate English, rough in accent, yet fluent: "You believe in her so much! You believe in her like that! . . . Ah! it gives me pleasure—it gives me joy! You—you are a good man."

And he had returned the handgrip. Yes, he had shaken hands with his brother's betrayer, impossible though it seemed. He had not spoken a word. But the artist had gone on, the tide of an impetuous nature flowing headlong: "You wish to see her—you wish to bring her the assurance of your faith in her. It is well, it is very well. I will trust you. Yes, I know where she is. Ah, as you have divined, she is far from me, far from here."

Then Concini had clutched his dense curls, as if to assist concentration of thought, had stared at his visitor with searching gaze. Then the swift hands had been flung out again.

"I will trust you; you have the eyes of pity and love. I do not hold with priests—as priests, but you—yes, I believe you will bring her good, a touch of comfort. . . . Ah! She is lonely! Ah! She needs comfort!"

He struck his own mouth with sudden gesture.

"No more—I must not speak of her." He glanced wildly at James; and then, as if in spite of himself, broke out again:

"Only this will I say—I must say it—to you I can say

it; that lady . . . I kneel before her in my heart, always: that most high lady, that most pure lady."

"That most high lady . . . that most pure lady!" . . . These were the words round which the traveler's mind had ceaselessly revolved, all through the rain-swept spaces of the French land, all through the night when the train labored upward in the ice-bound heights over which the sky, serene again, but moonless, throbbed with stars; through a glory of golden dawn—through the smiling valleys, bathed in a radiance which the light autumn mist caught and held. James had had no eye for these wonderful changes in the outer world. This passage from the sublime heights to glowing lowlands left him unstirred. He had not even that leap of the heart with which the pilgrim greets the breath of Italy, motherland of all who love the beautiful, land twice mother to the Christian soul.

"Most high lady, most pure lady!" No, he did not dare, even now, prostrate in heart before the source of all purity and all charity, allow himself to dwell upon the interpretation he would fain put upon that cry.

It is the sadness of priestly experience—the knowledge of the depth into which even the high and pure can be betrayed by human frailty—a sadness compensated only by trust in infinite Mercy.

It was, as he had always told himself, Morna's noble nature could not remain in touch with evil. When the moment of her awakening came from the fevered dream of passion, no sophistry, no compromise with conscience could have held her. "Ah! You have divined it," the young man had cried, "she is far from me, she is far from here!"

What a story of parting was contained in these words!

And how had the real Morna, the Morna whom it was impossible to doubt, impressed her natural integrity upon her lover's mind that he could rejoice in the fact that another should have taken it for granted they could not be together!

Here was a conclusion that James had reached many a time, and yet once again the very form of his thought started a new, insuperable objection: the real Morna was the Morna who loved her husband with an intensity akin to that which was now killing him. And once more, like the gleam of a lurid torch through mists of darkness, flashed the question: What failure in Ian had driven her to madness?

James sighed profoundly, and buried his head in his hands, striving to gather his powers together for one far-reaching prayer which should fortify and inspire.

The faint thud of the leathern curtain and quiet steps on the flags behind him scarcely roused his attention.

It was only when, having made his final sign of the Cross and genuflected, he rose and turned to go, that the figure seated in the chapel of the tomb arrested his gaze. It was the figure of a woman in black. The chair on which she sat was turned curiously with its back to the High Altar.

With hands clasped and bent head she seemed to be absorbed in contemplation of the carved figure. Though the head was covered by a black lace shawl, after the Ligurian custom, and the hands were ungloved, James' heart almost stood still. It was perhaps the expression of those hands, or something in the line of grace in the bending figure that brought instant recognition. It was Morna.

He hesitated; for a moment stood paralyzed. Should he go forward to her? Would it shock or distress her too much, lost as she was in abstraction? She might cry out in the church, or faint. What was she doing here? he asked himself. It was not to pray, as those who believed, for she was deliberately turning away from the tabernacle to gaze upon the tomb; turning away, he said to himself with a pang, from the House of Life to brood upon the abode of Death.

He took two timid steps toward her. At the same moment she rose and saw him. He thought he had never realized how tall she was. Her face seemed to him very white between the black folds, but so calm that he did not think she could have recognized him.

He came to her then quickly and called her by her name in a hushed voice. Her countenance remained unmoved, there was no quiver on the compressed lips; not a gleam in the melancholy, abstracted eyes.

"It's you, James. I hardly expected you today."

So Concini had written, or more probably, telegraphed. That he should have done so established more intimate terms between them than James believed were still existing. The pain of the thought, perhaps, too, the listless indifference of her attitude kept him dumb, struggling already with the sense of failure and irredeemable misery.

"Shall we go?" she asked.

It was then some impulse made him cast a look upon the tomb which had formed her singular place of meditation.

The beauty of the recumbent figure, belonging to that period when the simplicity of the "primitives" still lin-

gered under the mastery of the Early Renaissance, seized him even at such a moment. The young face that lay half turned on the cushion had an exquisite purity in all its lines. There was a languor and relaxation in the attitude, as of one glad to rest; only the eyelids, not quite closed, a certain sternness about the mouth, gave an indication that this was the awful repose of death, not the sleep of life. Above the tomb was a bas-relief representing a curious, emaciated, yet infinitely tender image of the Savior, leaning forward as if contemplating the dead youth. And beneath was carven the text:

EXPECTO RESURRECTIONEM MORTUORUM ET VITAM VENTURI SAECULI.

"I come here every day," said Morna. She was standing beside him, gazing with him.

"Just to look at that?" he whispered.

"Just to look at that, and—and for the words."

He thought there had come a trembling into her voice.

"Let us go," she said, after a pause. As he knelt a second at the end of the church before going out, he breathed a thanksgiving. She was not here to pray—yet; but she was here to seek comfort.

CHAPTER VIII

THE light and air outside caught them as with a breath of fire. Morna had left a large cotton parasol, such as the peasants use, in the porch, and this she raised quickly against the dazzling sunshine.

He followed her, as she walked on with what seemed a disregard of courtesy, even of kindness, toward him. Before they had gone many paces, she said abruptly, without turning her head:

"Why have you come?"

He paused before replying. To say, out here in the public road: "Ian has sent me," was an impossibility. He was not sure if he could tell her at all; or if he did, how he could tell her. He had the caution which went with his natural reserve. He answered at last, evasively but not untruthfully:

"I wanted to see you. . . . I felt I must see you again."

"It has taken you a long time to find it out, James." She said this in the same uninflected voice, and added presently, without a change of tone: "This is my house."

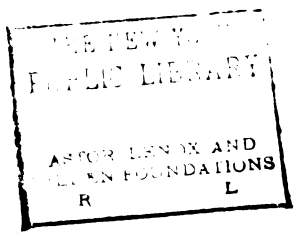
As they went she held the flowered umbrella between them, so that he could not see her countenance. But her tone was enough.

To encourage his sinking heart, he had to remind himself of that glimpse into her soul she had given him in the church: "I come here every day . . . for this, and for the words." She went there, not merely to feed the beauty-loving eye upon the exquisite grace of a work of art; nor even to satisfy a subtler esthetic sense by the austere sweetness of the spiritual conception there expressed; not even for the silence, that balm of wounded souls; but "for the words!"—for that immortal promise.

A tangled myrtle hedge, a rather dilapidated wooden gate, a rough bricked path leading upward, with here and there a couple of steps, through the usual luxuriant and neglected garden space, to a small house washed with roses



"'Since it is only I who suffer . . . was I not right?'"


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and flaunting bright green shutters. This was what he might have seen of Morna's refuge, had he noticed. But he noticed nothing. Her attitude was putting him from her determinedly. And her last phrase had struck the sensitive spot in his conscience. He said, humbly, as he reached the doorstep:

"I know I've been a long time. I am sorry." And as they entered together into the narrow hall, he repeated: "I am sorry."

She wheeled round at this and gave him a strange, inquiring look. He saw her breast heave; but she turned away quickly again and stood with her back to him, one hand resting against a closed door on the right.

The little passage was bricked, like the garden path, and ran through the house, leading to another garden at the back, the door of which was open. The whole place was balmy with the scent of the orange and lemon groves; and he could see a gay medley of autumn flowers, a patch of blue sky, and a wonderful stretch of tree-tops and far-away mountain.

Again the thought struck him poignantly:

"What a place . . . to be happy in!"

He looked at her in her black garb, at the thin hand pressing the panel as if in a struggle for self-control, at the bent head still shrouded in folds of lace. Morna, self-widowed!

It was but a moment's pause. She straightened herself.

"This way," she said, in her brief accents. "We have to go through the kitchen."

She opened the door as she spoke and passed before him. A peasant woman, with deeply tanned face, was

washing vegetables in a yellow bowl. It was the gayest place imaginable, streaming with sunshine, with walls washed lavender-blue. The woman called out in a strident, merry voice:

"Her excellency has a visitor, *che fortuna!*" and laughed. "A visitor at last!"

Morna crossed the floor without appearing to hear and flung back a door giving directly upon a flight of wooden stairway. She preceded him up the steps, through a matted landing, into a room with a huge wooden balcony, overlooking the great vista of valley and distant hill. Then she removed her veil, ran her fingers with mechanical gesture through the thick wings of her hair.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, with a faint smile, as he stood more terribly embarrassed than ever he had ever felt in his life. "It is too hot on the balcony now, otherwise we might have sat there. I do of an evening. You will have lunch, of course. It is dinner, really, here. I don't have it till one o'clock. Yes, sit there."

Her deliberate air, the cold smile, the obvious intention to keep him aloof, made him feel that it was for him to break the barrier; that, if he did not do so quickly, it might become impossible for him.

He took a chair and drew it nearer the little sofa where she had placed herself. A small bare table was between them. As he sat down, he said, giving her a direct look:

"You expected me, then?"

She lifted her head, and, inscrutable, returned his gaze.

"Yes," she answered. "Concini telegraphed." Then she added: "He had no permission to give my address. To warn me—it was the least he could do."

James made no attempt to answer this. Her head was once more bent. She sat before him, idly tracing with her finger the pattern of the polished walnut table.

His thought brooded upon her with a wondering pain. It cut him to the heart to find her so changed. There was nothing here of the Morna he had loved from childhood: the creature of radiance, all spontaneous sympathy, ready to share trouble or joy; nothing of the Morna whose company had been like sunshine and fresh winds—This was a woman all strange to him; one whose whole being seemed so steeped in bitter hopelessness that the very atmosphere about her lay on the spirit with a mysterious, benumbing coldness. He felt paralyzed.

She was the first to speak again.

"Why have you come?" she asked him, as if idly and without glancing up.

"You know why I am here, Morna. You yourself felt I ought to have come long ago."

"Did I?"

"Did you not ask me why I delayed so long?"

"Oh—" she folded her pale hands and fixed him now. "I did not mean to reproach you, believe me. I only wondered—" again a slight ironic smile curled her lips—"why it should be now. There is no reason why you should ever have come, of course. Nor, indeed, why you should want to come——"

"Oh, Morna!"

"It can't do any good, really. Not to me, certainly——"

It was with great difficulty that he said:

"If you don't reproach me, I reproach myself. I might

have been a help to you. Morna, I want to help you now."

"Do you mean my soul—poor James?"

The pain of his deep compassion for her escaped him in a broken whisper:

"Oh, poor Morna, yes—if I could help your soul—Morna, little sister of those old childish days, dear sister, you've always been that to me—must not your soul be precious to me? My dear, you're very unhappy, but there is another life where the—the mistakes we make in this one are set right. There is another life. You are drawn to the tomb out there, as you told me . . . because of the words. Is it not a great comfort?"

She made a dreary little movement of assent.

"I believe in the life of the world to come," he repeated, as if to himself.

"You believe that?" Then, smiling mirthlessly, "Of course you do. A priest—I forgot." She went on languidly: "Sometimes I try to think it's true, but—" She leaned her head on her hand. "I don't know what I think. I—" She broke off—"yet it must be nice to believe that sort of thing."

"Ah, if you had believed——"

"What?" She glanced at him darkly.

"If you had believed, you would not be here, as you are today."

"You say that? You say that to me?" There was hard resentment in her voice. A somber fire flashed in her eyes. "You? You know nothing. I believed too much, too utterly . . . that is what has brought me where I am."

"You believed in man," said the priest quickly. "I mean belief in God."

She remained silent, but a quiver on her pale face betrayed that his words had stirred some hidden spring of emotion. He went on, hesitating:

"Oh, don't think that I'm here to preach; still less that I'm here to blame—don't believe that, even in thought, I would presume to sit in judgment on you. I think indeed that I know more, that I understand. Morna . . . he told me himself."

"Who told you?" She had drawn herself straight. There was tension in her attitude, almost fierceness in her accents.

"Oh, my dear—Concini."

"Concini!"

The tone and air with which she flung back the name at him were a revelation.

Concini! The last of her thoughts. A being at an infinite distance from her, the most remote, the most insignificant in the world, as far as she was concerned. The disdain in her eye, the contempt on her lip, were not even for him, but for the folly that could associate her with him!

"Ah!" cried James, springing up, as the conviction, latent in his soul from the very first, suddenly blazed in triumph. "I knew it! I knew it always!"

She rose too, and stood facing him, leaning her hands on the table. She had colored deeply; and, for one flashing instant, the old beauty bloomed again in her white, tired face. Then the life went out, as if under the blast of a relentless wind. She sank back in her seat.

"Thank you," she said in a toneless voice. "The charity that thinketh no evil, I suppose." Her lip lifted with the unmirthful smile.

"No," he replied, this time without a second's hesitation, "but just because I know you."

"You could feel like that—even if it had been—even if I were what appearances make me seem and what I wanted appearances to make me seem—I know I'd do it again!"

"Morna!"

He stood blasted with astonishment.

Then passion swelled into her voice again. "Don't think I'd be repentant even if I were a sinner! I tell you, James." The barrier was being cast down at last. It was with her as it had been with Ian. Behind her apathy of despair, as behind his icy sardonic mood, there lay fire; it had been burning all the time; the flame of it was breaking out on him now.

"Since it is only I who suffer, since life goes so well with him, was I not right? Does it not prove me right? Oh, not from your point of view—from mine, from mine! Yes, I had rather this hell alone here. At least I can respect myself!"

"But, Morna——!"

She was trembling from head to foot as she faced him. It terrified him to see her thus torn with passion. She went on, disregarding:

"I never knew him! It was not in him to care—yes, I'm glad, I'm glad!" she repeated bitterly. "And I'm glad he's happy, James . . . and so prosperous, and enjoying life!"

"Morna—of whom are you speaking?"

"Of whom? Of Ian. Did you think perhaps I meant Concini?"

"Of Ian! Oh, my poor child, of Ian!"

She burst into harsh laughter.

"I know you would have spared me, kind James. Do you think, because I'm an outcast, hidden away from the world, that I cannot read about the doings of respectable people? It's all over there."

She pointed to a wicker table, piled with newspapers and illustrated weeklies.

"Oh!" she jeered. "I know all about the fine doings at Stronaven; what delightful gatherings they have there; how they're patching up the poor old place, and how—" her blanched lips twisted—"how the pretty wife of the Master promises to be one of the most brilliant hostesses in Scotland this season." With swift movements, she crossed the room and pulled a paper from the pile; and returning, spread it out before him, striking it with shaking hand. "There it is, there! And that's her picture, I suppose, the pretty wife of the Master of Stronaven! Do you see the date?—August the 20th. Not a year, not a year since we were together—Oh!" It was a long-drawn cry; mixed agonies of resentment and sorrow were in it. "I'm glad I did it, I'm glad I left him! It was the only way!"

And as he still stood silent, gazing on her with a look of extraordinary pity, she went on, falling piteously from her height of passion to tones of weakness, her sobbing breaths catching up her speech:

"When I knew he was like that, when I found out—Oh, I couldn't have gone on. . . . It isn't that I don't want

him to be light-hearted now. . . . I tell you, I'm glad of it!"

"Light-hearted!" said James with a groan. "Ian, light-hearted!"

She was quick to catch the note of tragedy now. She started, and turned to fix him, her whole being one intense question.

He shrank from speech. To speak the truth was like striking an already wounded creature; to be silent was to let the old wound fester. At last he said slowly, choosing his words, yet without faltering:

"If you can come to such conclusions on such evidence as this—this trivial, irresponsible tittle-tattle—" he could not keep the angry scorn out of his voice as he thought of these blasts of Mrs. Duvenant's little tin trumpet reaching out to this unhappy woman in her exile—"you, who were Ian's wife for over fourteen years, I ask myself now upon what folly you wrecked your life—" he paused, "your life and his."

"His!"

"Did you really believe what you have just been saying to me? Ask your inmost self, Morna—have you thought that Ian has ever been gay and light-hearted since—since you abandoned him?"

He saw that she was again trembling violently. She was of a stronger temper than Ian, and fought to keep her misery locked within her; but it was the same passion that racked them both.

"James—" she said, scarcely articulate, and stretched both her hands to him across the table, "you are telling me that he—that Ian, what was it you said?"

He thought it the worst of all to see her possessed, at the very climax of human pain, with a kind of piteous joy.

"Ian is a broken man."

It had to be said. He could clothe the fact in no other words. She cast herself forward on the table, her face upon her outstretched arms, and burst into sobs; the tearless, rending sobs of those who mourn without hope.

In his mission work he had seen such extremes of human suffering. He knew the aspect of such unblessed sorrow.

"If she could but weep!" he thought, and said to himself, "She has not known the relief, in all this long-drawn agony, of one softening tear!" There was nothing for him but to wait till the paroxysm was passed. He waited. All those who seek to heal, whether the spirit or the flesh, know these moments, when, impotent, they must look on and let irremediable pain exhaust itself of its own violence.

The spiced airs blew upon him from the lemon groves, fresh of the sea, yet hot of the sunshine. Some bird chirped and chirped under the window; and a song, indolent, nasal, utterly contented, rose fitfully up from the kitchen. An earth that seemed so satisfied, so kind, so full of small, warm joys—to hold this torture! Each hard sob struck on his heart.

Suddenly a great clash of bells filled the whole sunny world. The frescoed church hard by chimed out the four quarters in merry jangling cadence, and then in solemn voice proclaimed the hour of one.

Morna shuddered. She lifted her head and turned upon her companion her burning, hopeless gaze.

"I beg your pardon, James," she said, pushing her

heavy hair off her brow with that most forlorn of gestures. "I am ashamed of myself. Give me a little time. You have somehow made things seem different. I—I don't know where I am. Could you come back in an hour—or this evening perhaps? I am so dazed."

He rose instantly.

"I will come again after six," he said.

CHAPTER IX

IT was to the jangle of bells again that James left the porch of the frescoed church and directed his steps toward the Casa Benedetto. The Angelus was still ringing. It was the sunset hour; the whole place was steeped in rosy radiance. Faint mists were rising between the boles of the orange trees, and they, too, caught the glow. As he turned inland, he thought of the wonder that must lie over the sea, of its purples and crimsons, and the waves creaming amber-tipped, upon the shore. The myrtle flung out its aromatics as he passed in through the untidy gate; from a jutting rock that flanked the house on its right, a clump of aloes thrust giant blades sharp against the sky.

The door stood open. He knocked on the panel, and waited. There came no response and after a while he stepped into the narrow, dark passage and knocked at the kitchen door. Again there was no answer. With an unacknowledged disquietude he walked into the room; where, save for the glow of the charcoal fire, there was no sign of life. The house seemed asleep, basking. He called;

there was no reply. Then, rather hurriedly, he crossed the brick floor and mounted the shadowy stairs. The door of Morna's living-room was ajar, and he went in. It was filled, too, with the rose of sunset; the double windows were flung open, and out on the wide balcony he saw her.

She was sitting on a low chair, wrapped in a thick black cloak, bending forward, her chin on her hand. The figure had something of unnatural mourning in the midst of the ruddy splendor.

She heard his approach, rose, and came in to him. Their hands met for the first time. She kept her fingers closed upon his and drew him, without speaking, out on to the balcony.

"Look!" she then said, with a wide gesture.

He stood, transfixed. Beyond the garden the ground fell away very abruptly, still luxuriantly clothed with a wonderful green; and, almost as abruptly, the hills rose again, to the east and south, leaving the west open to the sea. The mists were rising from below and had gathered thickly; and they were all dyed wth the level crimson rays. It was like a huge cauldron of magic vapors; the shadows in the hollows of the rocks were violet; on an eastern slope a cluster of stone-pine struck a solemn note. Behind it the heavens were already gathering exquisite opalescent tints, melting into each other.

He turned quickly to Morna; the glory was on her pale cheek, too, but could not warm it. He was shocked at her look; he sighed involuntarily.

"Yes," she said suddenly. "This beauty makes things worse I sometimes think—yet it is all I have. You're not

cold?" she went on quickly. "Then let us stay out a while longer—till the mists reach us."

"Are you quite alone here?" he asked her anxiously.

"Yes, except for Serafina."

"That is your servant? There seemed to be no one in the house. The doors were open."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"What of it? No one would rob me—even if I had anything to lose."

"Have you no friends—no one——"

"Friends!—Who do you think would come to me now! Whom do you think I could endure?"

She went to the end of the wooden balcony and stood gazing out upon that stretch of liquid fire that was the sea. Then: "Oh, James," and the cry seemed forced by unendurable suffering, "all beauty is poison to me! The beauty of the world that meant so much to us—and now the black cloud is over everything! My misery is in the very air of the sea, in the taste of bread and of wine, in the scent of the flowers and the orange trees. Oh, in the scents above all—let us go in."

The room was already full of shadows, but it suited both best. She began to speak again from the threshold; and it was once again to betray that bitterness which was eating her heart out.

"I've been thinking over what you said to me. You want me to believe I've broken Ian's life. When you said it I thought, I was mad enough to think, you meant it was because it was life without me," she laughed—"the fool in me is not yet dead! But I've been thinking. If he's unhappy it's not for want of me, it's for what I've done

—that's what hurts him, since you say he's so changed. His pride, it hurts his pride, what he calls his honor. He's put another woman in my place. I knew he would do that. Ah, how well I knew him! I made it all easy for him, because I knew he would just do that. And he's making great parade of not caring, and having people about him and flaunting his enjoyment—I understand that. That's to punish me. Well, if I could have done it otherwise, sparing him and his pride, I would. But it's not in him to feel things long. In a little while——"

"Stop," said the priest very gently. "Before you say anything further, tell me, Morna, where has Ian wronged you that you left him?"

She had flung her cloak away and was restlessly moving about the room; but at this she stood still. After a moment she came close to him where he sat in the light of the window and said, in an altered voice:

"I don't think I can do that, James. Isn't it enough if I tell you that I came to know his love had never been what I believed——"

"You said today that you forgot I was a priest. You are forgetting it again."

The extreme quiet of his tone exercised its power.

She sat down near him, and said in more natural accents: "You mean confession? But, James——"

"I mean," he said, still in the same gentle, impersonal way, as if indeed he had been in the confessional, minister to the soul alone; "that the priest is accustomed to hear stories of sin, and once heard, to keep them locked away, even from his own thought. No, I do not mean confession, you are not of my faith, you cannot unfortunately have

the relief of such a sacrament. But this I can say to you, that whatever you confide will be as sacred, if you wish, as if it had been given under the seal."

He saw her eyes widen upon him in the dusk; saw how quickly her breath came between parted lips. But still she hung back.

"Stories of sin," she said slowly at last, "if you mean that I——"

For the first time he showed sternness toward her. "I asked for the story of Ian's wrong-doing toward you. Your share of sin in the matter, Morna, I know."

She flung back her head, but he laid his hand on her shoulder with compelling touch. He felt himself so completely the priest only at this moment that all his awkward embarrassments had vanished.

"Let us leave that. Tell me about Ian and you."

She bowed her head and a smothered sob escaped her. Two or three times she tried to speak. And then at last, painfully, in a low voice, she began:

"I found out—I discovered—there was another woman——"

James made a sharp movement, quickly repressed.

"You found out—" he said, after a pause, in a gentle prompting voice.

"It was when he was so ill, last year, you remember—I had never had the smallest suspicion—if anyone had, before then, used the word suspicion in connection with Ian, I would have laughed—he had such headaches, he could not be bothered with his letters. He said to me—'Don't even bring them in to me, read them all.'"

Brother superseded priest in the listening man.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "such was the confidence between you! His conscience was not troubled. He could not have thought there was anything to hide in his life!"

She answered him harshly:

"Wait—you don't understand. That's all part of it. He—he thought so little of it. No, his conscience was not troubled. But there was a letter. A letter from a woman—asking him to come and see her—or to send her money. She said: 'I've not forgotten you, dear boy. I trust you've not forgotten me, though it's long since we met. . . .'"

"But, my dear child, is this your evidence?"

"Oh, wait, wait, it's only the beginning. I thought—as you think now—that it was just one of those—those creatures one knows about, someone he had met years ago as she said, quite innocently, perhaps, or even when he was just a wild boy. I threw it into the fire. I didn't even think of it. And then later—a week later—he was better, but he was fretful and tired, and wouldn't be bothered, poor darling—" she broke on the two words that had slipped out so naturally—"Oh, James!" she cried with a sob.

He was more moved himself than he had yet been in their intercourse. He could find no word of comfort. After a pause he prompted again:

"You still read his letters, then?"

"Yes, another letter came. She, the woman, a Mrs. Avenell—Joan Avenell, she called herself, seemed angry. She was threatening him, really. She was surprised not to hear from him. Had he forgotten how to write to her? She set value on his letters, she said. She wondered what

value he set on them. Only two of them, but worth something, she ventured to think. What did he think? Most people had forgotten South Africa, she knew."

"South Africa!" repeated James in amazement. "But that is so long ago."

"Not too long ago for blackmail."

"No," said the priest. He knew how many a man may be ruined even toward the end of a well-spent life, for one folly of youth.

"I didn't burn that letter," went on Morna. She was sitting clasping her knees, in the low chair she had chosen. He could see the fine lines of her profile pale against the gathering gloom. "I kept it. I thought: 'When Ian is better I'll show it to him.' I thought so little of it at first. Women of that kind, I said to myself, and what they do, are not worth notice. Should I let a vile creature disturb for one instant my confidence in my husband—in Ian? He would have a simple explanation, and I would be ashamed to have asked for it—I would not even ask for an explanation. I should take his 'No.' And then it began to haunt me. I would lie awake at night, wondering. . . . When he raised his Company for South Africa—that was our only great parting, you know—that was the only time we were long away from each other—he wrote when he could, but there were those weeks when he could not get news to me; was it then, I asked myself? I got out all his old letters. Oh, how I am talking! But it's to make you understand. There came an hour at last when I knew I must get at the truth. I went up to London. I found the woman—yes, James, it was true. He had betrayed me—out there, for her."

The listener made no sign or movement. After that pause, filled by a memory so poignant, she went on:

"I bought those letters from her. You know I have a little money of my own. And when I had read them, I burned them."

"But then—but surely——"

She continued as if he had not spoken.

"At first I felt as if I had had a blow on my head. I couldn't think. I didn't know what I should do. I was only three days away from Stronaven. I tried not to think —just to go on as if nothing had happened. He seemed so glad to see me again. He was still dreadfully pulled down. There was one thing I knew; I couldn't speak to him yet. . . . And then, and then it all became intolerable——"

"Intolerable—you couldn't forget, you couldn't forgive?"

"Oh, no—how little you understand! How little you can guess what was in my heart. All that time he was in South Africa—there was not a breath I drew that was not drawn in anguish for him. My whole soul was with him. My whole soul had always been his since we were children together, while he——"

"A sudden assault of temptation in the midst of all the license of war. A man's nature is not like a woman's; there are baser sides to it."

Her eyes blazed on him.

"If he had died then—false to me, and if there is an eternity. . . . Ah! don't make light of it, don't tell me you make light of it!"

"God forbid!"

"If the union of man and wife, if such a union as ours were not kept precious and sacred and whole, then what was it? What is it? How was it different from that other thing? Was I to be a Mrs. Avenell to him? That's all I was; when he hadn't me, he took her. And when I left him, he took another."

"Morna—Morna!"

"When he came back to me," she cried in ever-growing passion, "I thought my heart would break with the joy. He hadn't a shadow. It was nothing to him that he had desecrated the one exquisite thing in life, the integrity of our love."

"But—did you at least hear what he had to say? How do you know he did not repent? His very feeling for you would have kept him silent."

"Oh, James, don't think I didn't tell myself all that; don't think I didn't plead for him! I tried to go on, I tried. Oh, do you believe I wanted to leave him? It was because—it was because I loved him as I did, without measure, to the exclusion of every other interest in life. I had gathered everything into that one channel. It was just for that! Then, then—" her accents failed her. She went on, in a whisper: "He saw something was wrong with me. He couldn't understand. He thought I was odd, fantastic. He had never seen me like that before. One day he looked at me quizzically—'Lovely Enigma' he called me and laughed and kissed me."

"Lovely Enigma?" repeated James vaguely.

"James—James—that was what he had called the other, in that second letter. 'Lovely Enigma, it shall be as you order and—' and the rest."

Then, into the heavy silence that followed, Morna cried out: "It was then I knew I must leave him!"

"Morna! on the chance of one word!"

"One word! One word can kill! That word killed my last illusion."

She got up and stood, towering it seemed to him, in the heavy gloom. "Do you think I ought to have stayed and shared—that?"

Before he could answer, the door was flung open noisily; the stout figure of Morna's peasant servant was outlined in the faint light on the landing; and a loud, good-humored voice began scolding into the darkness of the room. The flood of Italian was too swift and too rustic for James to be able to do more than follow a phrase here and there. But the gist of it was obvious. There was the Excellency again, sitting in the black, perishing in the cold; a child would have had the sense to put a match to the firewood; and the window open, the mists coming in! Still scolding she dived into the passage to come back carrying a small brass oil lamp of antique simplicity—the light from three unshaded wicks flickered on the broad tanned visage, which smiled in spite of wrath under the gaudy kerchief.

At sight of the priest, she halted and began a series of curtseys and apologies. Then she deposited her burden and, still chattering, ran to him, dropped on one knee, seized and loudly kissed his hand. The Excellency had told her he was a priest. She was up again with incredible energy; closed and barred the outer shutters, and then the windows, with much authority. She proceeded to light the fire in the open brick hearth, the two candles on

the mantel-shelf; caught up her lamp, and remarking that the signora must have a hot dish for supper for the reverend guest bustled to the door. But on the threshold she turned round. Apparently something in her mistress's attitude of somber abstraction had struck her. She looked from her to the visitor. "Ah, the poor one—so young and beautiful, and already a widow— Ah, the pity!" she clacked her tongue. "The Father must speak to her of the good God and console her!"

After the door closed, the silence between the two continued. And then Morna moved over to the hearth and stood staring down at the flame of pine-cones and wood splinters that leaped and roared round the piled logs.

"I pass for a widow here," she said at last.

"Alas!" The word escaped him as the cold thought fell on his soul, how soon the reality was like to be.

Striving to face the situation in the light of his calling, to eliminate the human stirrings which now clouded his judgment, to forget that he was a brother, to stifle the cry of the blood, the pride of the race, he sat in deep silence.

The whole problem was solved now, and that simply enough. After all he had always felt there must be some solution which would involve Ian and exculpate Morna.

He saw clearly into the woman's soul, and beheld such fierce devouring resentment that his brother's initial lapse into sin seemed to shrink into insignificance in contrast.

"And so that is the story," he said at length. "The young Concini was already at Stronaven, if I remember—you made him just your tool of vengeance."

She turned brusquely from the hearth, walked over to the table at which James was sitting, and took her place on the little sofa opposite to him.

"Yes, Concini was the tool at hand," she said, looking at him with eyes in which his dry tone had roused the spirit of defiance. "He was painting me," she went on doggedly, "and every day, I suppose, he saw more misery in my face. He—" she hesitated suddenly, "he had conceived a kind of adoration for me—Oh, something highflown and chivalrous, or—put it any way you like—something doglike. One day he fell on his knees and said—he'd never spoken like that before—'You're breaking your heart—can I do nothing for you? I'd die for you!' And then it came to me in a flash——"

"You had no more mercy upon him than upon Ian."

"What do you mean?"

"You made use of this youth and his infatuation without regard to his conscience, his good name—his life. Ian might have killed him."

"Ah, if Ian had done that!"

Her lip curled, her eyes flashed. The priest read a little deeper into the mysteries of a woman's wounded soul. Had she ever been anything but pure pagan?

"Ian never thought of killing Concini—or me. He never even thought of pursuing us. If he had, James—if he had, he would have found that we had parted at Calais—I gave Concini my hand to kiss at parting—he did not even ask for that. It was I gave it for him to kiss—as I would have patted a faithful dog. You believe that, James?"

James had been leaning his head on his hand, looking

at her under the shade of his fingers; he now straightened himself and fixed her. There was a deep severity mingled with the sadness of his gaze.

"I'm going to say a strange thing to you," he said. "If you had gone away with that man compelled by a genuine human passion, I think you would be less guilty before God this moment."

The color welled into her face, then ebbed as quickly. She opened her lips to speak but could find no words.

"Ian's sin committed so many years ago, and not repeated—certainly not repeated—even you do not suspect him of that——"

Even you! He was not aware himself of the terrible indictment conveyed in just those two words.

She formed the answer voicelessly: "No."

"You left him then because he was false to his marriage vow. What of your marriage vow? Was that the way to keep it? Were you dispensed from fealty because of that lapse of his? In any illness he had, or any accident, you were ready to nurse him in the body with unremitting devotion. But that infinitely more precious part, his soul, that part of Ian which you yourself would be the first to acclaim as being what counted in your eyes—his real self, his soul, his spirit, the thought of a sickness there makes the whole man abhorrent to you. You have no womanly compassion there, no desire to bind or heal. You judged and condemned him irrevocably, unheard. You planned and carried out your flight in secret. You never gave him a chance of explaining and you never knew what excuse he may have had."

She was shaken to the innermost depths by this search-

ing severity. Once or twice she put out her hand as if to ward off words that struck like blows.

"Nothing that he could say could alter the facts. Excuses . . . explanations! That would have been indeed degradation——"

She interrupted herself. A cry broke from her:

"Oh, there are things no woman can speak of!" and all her agonized womanhood rang in her accents. "To get away, that was all I could do. I could not trust myself. I had a traitor here within me—" She struck her breast fiercely. "I should have been wax in his hands—he would have kept me by him, I loathing myself. . . . I should have been on the level of that woman!"

"My dear—" said James, and his voice was gentle again, "you poor unhappy soul! To forgive would have degraded you? Your natural love for your husband would have brought you to the level of a wanton? In God's name where have you set your standards of right and wrong? Is it possible that the prayer which every Christian, the world over, says daily, has never crossed your lips all these long months? Or, if you have prayed, how have you dared say those words—as we forgive those that trespass against us. . . . Ah, it is as I said to Ian: Your love, the love of both of you, was a fair-weather love. You start at that? You are ready to cry out a denial. Think, is it not true? In the first storm, you fell apart—forlorn adventurers both, at the mercy of the winds of circumstance and the currents of your own passions!"

His worn pale face was flushed. His always luminous eyes seemed now on fire.

"Your union was the mere earthly bond of mutual at-

traction," he went on, his voice kindling even as his glance. "Neither of you have ever had the faintest conception of the sacredness of the tie that bound you. You allowed no supernatural light to penetrate into your hearts by which you could have guided, sanctified and regulated your happy journey together. And so, when the test came, you failed, both of you." He remembered at that moment Mr. Inglis' indictment of Ian in the self-same words. "You had no thought but to strike each other, to wound back where you had been wounded, to be revenged because of the very passion you had lavished on each other. In what a savage haste did you not, both of you, set out to destroy your home irrevocably. I tell you, Morna, you and he, you wanted to kill just what the other held most dear. Anger, anger and pride made you murderers in your hearts."

His voice rang out deep-toned—then sank almost to a whisper. It had to be said, and it had to be said now, and his spirit wept within him.

"Where has it brought you both? You are here alone, a dishonored woman—and Ian, among strangers in the old place, is a dying man!"

She sat a moment, staring as if she had not understood. Then she sprang up, took an uncertain step toward him, and fell on her knees like one struck down. As he ran to her in alarm, she lifted a face, the most piteous, he thought, he had ever seen.

"Oh, Ian—Oh, Ian, what have I done——"

And then the tears came.

CHAPTER X

UP in his room, under the roof of the roadway *osteria*, James sat long, reading his breviary by the light of a single candle. He needed the forced abstraction from the earthly trouble. Closing the book at last, he moved over to the open window and wrapped in his traveling cloak, sat gazing, not down upon the earth where lights flickered vaguely and feebly here and there, but upward where a serene sky was set with a splendor of stars.

There came to him then many memories, and even those most charged with bitter anguish assumed a new aspect to the eyes of his soul. Honey out of the lion's mouth, sweetness out of the very jaws of Death. The faith that can trace the signs of God's mercy, and find a promise of future peace even in life's most desperate tragedies, is the believer's reward. Never did James think to discover the finger of Providence so clearly; never did the comfort of the Divine Protection more closely envelop him than in this moment.

His thoughts flew back to that night at Stronaven when the old walls had cried out the dishonor of the house, and the Master's frenzy of wrath and despair. He recalled how sitting before Morna's portrait, he had sought to read the secret hidden in its limned beauty, where the painter had so truly caught the haunting of an implacable thought. He recalled the strange look of the eyes, and how he had thought they were those of one fixing irremediable doom—

alas, poor Morna—self-doomed, with all she had best loved on earth!

It was upon that night, too, that the old volume of Eschylus, falling open in his hand, had seemed to voice the shame of his own house.

How it had struck at his heart then, obliterating the comfort which those other words read in the glow of sunset, a few hours before, had brought him:

"Ah! Ah! for the house and its lord! Ah! for the marriage, for the memories of love!"

Here stood the world of the flesh, and there the world of the spirit! And the world of the spirit would conquer. Yes, it must conquer. Ian, through agony of mind and body was working toward the heights; he had shown greater generosity than Morna. In him love had triumphed. Believing her guilty, he had yet forgiven. . . . It was true that his conscience bore a secret stain; that upon his soul lay the initial guilt. The story of past folly which had been poured into the priest's ears tonight had come with no shock of surprise; rather, indeed, as the confirmation of long intuition.

"What have you done?"

James remembered how he had put that question and with what a look Ian had answered him. He was sure now that the thought of the old forgotten sin had vaguely stirred within his brother's mind.

But, without minimizing for one instant the grievousness of the sin so long hidden that it was practically a thing forgotten, James considered that the many years of unswerving devotion should have atoned greatly for the offense committed in the hot irresponsibility of youth.

Yet he was not without a keen understanding, too, of Morna's point of view. As she had been entire in devotion to the one idol of her life, so had her revolt been entire, too, when the feet of clay were revealed. And by a most unfortunate chain of circumstances, the actual treachery, sordid as it was, had been presented to her with a horrible actuality. Suspicion and proof had followed each other, stroke upon stroke; she had seen the woman, whose meretricious attractions had momentarily supplanted loyalty and love in her husband; read his letter to her and—surely by some freak of the Spirit of Mischief himself—through the merest chance of a caressing phrase had been placed, as she deemed, upon the same level in his mind—wife and whilom mistress. It would have been enough to sting even a less proud and sensitive nature to a mad resolve.

Tonight he had brought back from that last hour with Morna no feeling but that of tenderest pity; and he could tell himself that here, too, good was proving stronger than evil. The long repressed tears had broken forth. It was at first indeed such a passion of weeping, such an ecstasy of grief, he almost feared to see life itself ebb out. But presently the higher, better sorrow, the softened mood brought healing. These streaming tears seemed to be washing away all that had been so strange and repellent in her, all the hardness, the unwomanly arrogance of resentment, the perverse self-blinding of pride, the twisted distorting vision. He found the real woman once more, Morna in her right mind, deep-hearted, loving, with every impulse toward loyalty and devotion.

When she had grown a little calmer, he had been able

to tell her as much as he dared about Ian. There was a great deal which it would have been mere cruelty to let her even guess at. But with all his pitying reticence and desire to spare her, it was an hour that had wrung both their hearts. There was one passionate moment in which she declared her determination to go back to the man who wanted her so much. Nothing, she had cried, in heaven or earth could keep them apart and nothing would matter so long as they were together. And he was ill and he wanted her.

She had sprung to her feet, and it seemed as if she must start that very instant. Her whole being was like a ship caught in the blast of a hurricane, irresistibly driven.

"Morna!" he had called. She had turned and come back to him. On her poor disfigured face there was struggling an eagerness that was almost joy, and he had to kill it. It had needed but one short phrase: "You would make everything infinitely worse for him."

"Oh, James—James!" she had wailed; and the quick sobbing had begun again.

"He would not wish it." Oh, how hard it had been to have to remind her: "There is that other tie—there is his honor."

"He is ill and he wants me!" There was something of a mother's anguish in that cry—every woman is half mother to the man she loves.

"It will be for his sake—keep to that," he had said. And then had come the plaint which had given him his first opening to consolation.

"He is dying—it is my work and I can do nothing!"

"Yes, you can, you can suffer for him. You can offer up all you suffer for him."

It was a new and a strange doctrine. Such a thought had never entered into her mind before. But out of her infinite need, she caught at it. It met that need as nothing else could. Here was no feeble attempt to comfort a sorrow which was beyond comfort; here was a teaching strong and stern. To take the awful pain itself and make use of it, and the more it rent the more would be the service. Out of this agony of hers she might even now bring good to Ian—that was God's mercy. It was God's way. She had wrought the evil herself. He would permit her to wring out of her punishment help and grace for the beloved in his need.

The peasant woman in her simple faith had bidden the priest speak to her mistress "of the good God and console her." James had had the satisfaction of having left Morna with the dawning of the peace of God in her heart.

She had asked him where he meant to say his Mass; and begged him to come and break his fast at her house afterwards. He told himself, as he rose stiffly from the window, that he would offer up that Mass for her and Ian. How many times had he not, this last year, joined their names at the great moment of supplication! How many times, in all the prosperous years before! . . . It came to him now, that never had he felt them so near God's mercy as in this travail, this time of dire separation and regret.

Honey out of the lion's mouth.

CHAPTER XI

ITALY alone seems to hold the secret of such mornings as that which now greeted James MacIvor as he left the *osteria* for the church on the hill. Sky, mountain, valley, sea were exquisite in translucency. Not even a shadow but it was steeped in light. Cypress and stone-pine had a quiver of gold about their blacker outline. The mists that still hung in the deeper hollows empurpled, were shot with gold; the fragrance of wood-smoke floated in the air, mingled with the tang of the sea and the never lost spices of the orange and lemon orchards.

This morning the appeal of all this wonder of earthly beauty did not grip his heart with pain. Every soul struggling upward reaches now and again a distinct resting-point from which it can look down upon conquered ground. He looked down now on yesterday's struggles as from a place of rest.

The sense of strength and comfort increased in him as he stood before the altar; and he felt scarcely surprised when, coming out of the sacristy after his Mass into the body of the church, he saw Morna's figure in the D'Este chapel. She was kneeling, not facing the tomb this time, but so that her gaze could reach the high altar.

"She has been praying—at last," he said to himself, and his heart stirred with the mystic joy of helping to turn a soul to God.

He took his place, at a little distance, for his thanks-

giving; then he rose and carried his chair close beside hers, and knelt again.

She gave him a grave, gentle look; then, between the tomb and the altar, a little while longer, they knelt together.

Once more, before leaving the church, they stood side by side, and looked upon the marble where youth and comeliness and death, and stern sweet resignation lay so strangely blended under the pity of the bending Christ.

A shaft of sunlight striking in through one of the round amber-curtained windows, caught the carven face, and gave the stone a startling air of life.

James saw what had not struck him the day before—a certain resemblance to Ian in his beautiful boyhood. He wondered if that had been what attracted Morna. Her words, as they emerged into the porch, answered him.

"You saw," she said, "how like it is. Oh, James—" Her lip quivered. "That was the first thing that struck me. It seemed, Oh, such agony! I thought: he looked like that, he was like that—then. And I remembered how we had loved each other, so purely, and how we were now lost to each other forever . . . and then, I saw the words!"

He pressed her hand. Out of the black of her enveloping veil, her face looked very wan and tired; the eyes set in shadows, stained with the night's tears.

But it was the Morna he loved; nay, it was even a new Morna. Upon the altered, sorrow-stricken face lay a faint reflection as of a rising light that spiritualized, beautified it beyond what he had ever known it.

As they went along the road in the brisk, gay sunshine,

she spoke again, and her words went to strengthen what was as yet no more than an undefined impression.

"You must have prayed for me, prayed very hard for me, this morning, dear James," she said with her piteous smile. "Something came to me, I can't tell what, I don't know if I shall ever be able to think like you—it's all vague and it's all mystery. But God is somewhere. His mercy was there, with you. I felt that. And if I can, indeed, expiate for my wicked madness, and help Ian, help my darling . . . " Her voice trailed off. He saw that she was fighting with her tears and knew that the source, so lately unsealed, was ready to overflow. But he knew, too, that with such a nature as hers the weeping would be in secret.

When they reached the welcome of the open door in the little pink house she had regained her self-control.

The hour that followed in the garden was so fraught with sweetness in its melancholy, that for long afterwards it haunted James like a strain of music. The breakfast table had been spread in the vine-grown loggia under the balcony; and before them lay the great wonderful vision of valley and mountain with a peep of the sea, silver where the full light caught it and violet in the shade of the crags.

It was a rustic meal, but all steeped in the magic of Italy. The shadow of the vine-leaves played on the coarse white tablecloth. The coffee steamed fragrantly in its earthenware pot. A huge gray loaf of peasant bread tasted of the wheat. And the small yellow and black grapes from the hillside vineyard, already a little shriveled, were sunshine transmuted to honey.

Morna ministered to him—with a word here and there on indifferent matters. Once she went to the kitchen win-

dow to call for figs, and plucked two or three twining vine-leaves to slip under them as she carried them back in a gayly painted dish. He told her he had found sun in the grapes, that he had never imagined any fruit so pure and sweet—and she answered that the sun was in the figs, too—more of it. And smiling: "Something like a sunset, rather," she added, "the glory concentrated."

And then the sigh came quickly upon her smile; the sigh of the heart in ever-present pain. He understood that for his sake she was refraining from speaking of their sorrow during the repast. But he did not want reserve to grow up again between them; and so broke one of the silences by a direct question:

"This is a marvelous place! How did you discover it?"

The blood raced into her face.

"Concini told me of it—" she answered in a low voice. Last night she had spoken of this man without the smallest emotion but today it was different. He saw how much it cost her to pronounce the name. He measured thereby the distance over which her soul had traveled. "He has an aunt here," she went on, looking down as she spoke. "She has a pension, and I went there first. Then I found this little house that was once an orange gardener's."

"It is very peaceful," said the priest, "and very beautiful."

"There are times," she proceeded, after a pause, "when I cannot bear it for its very beauty . . . like last night, when the valley was on fire. It turned me—" she hesitated, "it turned my soul into something dreadful, something that hated, that wanted to destroy."

"But that's gone," he said quickly.

She lifted her deep eyes on him with a kind of surprise.

"Yes, it's gone. But it may come back."

"No, no!" he still spoke eagerly, "hate cannot come back!"

She pondered. "No," she said, her accents deepening. "You have driven that blackness away from me. And it was not always there—" She was making an effort again because of him. She glanced at his cup.

"You're not drinking your coffee. Shall I get you a fresh cup?"

To reassure her, he drank hastily; and then drew her back to her theme. "No, you could not be long in the blackness. God has been helping you all the time to reach the light, through this beauty and this solitude."

She had fallen back into her musing air, gazing out to the shifting hues of the distant mountain line against the sky.

"No." she said at last, "I don't think it was that. There is something quite earthly in me that always craves for open air and green boughs—Oh, just this. And when I couldn't think or feel any more, that earth-mind of mine basked and was pleased. But Oh, the sun sickens me now and again. What wouldn't I give for a breath of the moors . . . just one dash of the wild, wet, highland winds in my face, and the glens in the mist, and the rocks all shining in the wet and the black of the wet winter heather. Oh, James—I never shall again—I never shall again!"

There was only one word by which he could answer her, and it was a hard one. "It is expiation!" he said, pitiful.

She flung him a haunted, frightened glance.

"James—" she faltered, "you said last night—" she

broke off, she could not phrase it that way. "When you spoke of Ian, you said he was—so ill. Do the doctors think this?"

He answered, as his gaze of pity deepened upon her.

"No, my dear, the doctors are hopeful. Mrs. Inglis telegraphed to me in Paris: 'Sir Duncan Ord quite hopeful.'"

Her color was fluctuating painfully.

"But last night you said——"

"I know."

She drew a long breath.

"But you—you think he's dying?"

"I do."

She turned her face sharply away, and he saw her hands tighten convulsively as they clasped her knees.

The myriad sounds of the sun-bright garden crowded into the silence.

Then she said, without moving: "And it is I who have done it!"

James paused before replying.

"Grigor thinks Ian strained his heart during that wild expedition," he answered, evading.

"But it was I drove him to that!"

"Ah, my dear—you can say as truly that it was his past sin that drove you to your reckless vengeance, and his counter-stroke of anger that has rushed him to the desperate things that are killing him."

She started, questions quivered on her lips, but she drove them back. A shudder passed over her. The pale hands clasped each other tighter, and this time it was all those unspoken thoughts of hers he could hear calling out

to him in the silence. Those questions she could never put, those things that he could never tell her, all that agony bound up with Ian's remarriage; the woman who sat in Morna's place, who bore the name Morna had borne, who wore Ian's ring and claimed him utterly by law and custom; she who ruled in the old home and was making such changes there that they were worth bruiting in the public press.

The silence grew and brooded about them; and he looked with ever sadder eyes of wonder on the woman who had flung away her life with both hands. And as he looked, his wonder shifted and fastened itself, far away in the north, upon his brother's folly—that folly he was dying of. To have replaced Morna by Oenone!

Morna, who always loved simplicity; herself, it seemed, a creature of the broad airs and the mountain skies; Morna, with her wild grace, her untamable spirit; her leaping freedom of fancy. And Oenone—typical product of modernity; useless, spoiled, luxurious, harmless, frivolous creature; a forced flower of unnatural culture, incapable of existing outside its own hothouse atmosphere. The contrast seized him with a force that made facts seem a stupid or fantastic dream.

The incongruous decking out of Stronaven under the Duvenant dispensation became pictured in his mind. Once again he felt himself prisoned within those padded walls, in the heavy heated atmosphere, its terrible, all-permeating exotic scent in his nostrils. And, by a twist of subconscious memory, an impression of the room into which Morna had led him yesterday, arose in sharp comparison. Bare almost as a convent parlor, but how sun-

warmed, how filled with the fresh airs from those wide, open windows, where there was not even a curtain to temper sun or wind, where the shadows of dancing vine tendrils played about them as they sat, even as here in the open. Plain almost to austerity as it was, there was a grace wherever Morna presided. Ian had been wont to say laughing that in any season Morna was like April let loose about the house, and green boughs from the copse, a blossoming apple branch or a feathery sheaf of larch, were more to her than orchid or carnation. She would endure no room with a closed window, no scent but that of the outdoor things, or yet the incense of wood in the hearth. She loved simplicity in all her ways, and only permitted the richness which it had been her husband's pleasure to keep about her beauty, when it was stamped with the sincerity of those olden days when every artisan was also an artist.

Sighing, he asked her at last, did she intend remaining on here indefinitely.

Oh, yes, she supposed so, why not? Then the heavy languor of her glance kindled. "There s the tomb, you see —it's all I've got." She broke off. Prescience seized him at these words; it was as if the bright sky overhead had become clouded.

Highlanders know such moments in which the spirit reaches out to the future. "Yes," a voice said within him, "that is all she can ever have now—a tomb!"

And then he remembered the graven promise and the cloud lifted.

"Hold on to that," he said; and something in her black figure the forlornness of her attitude, that air of high pride

crushed—seeing her so passionate and so humble, so sorrow-stricken, so hopeless, so resigned, renewed in him infinite stirrings of compassion.

"Keep before your mind that this life must pass for the happiest—and that there is nothing so foolish or so wrong that cannot be atoned for before God. Remember that it is the spirit that counts. Though by your own sins of anger, both of you, you have become divided in the flesh, you are still, in the sight of God, man and wife!"

"James!" she hardly breathed the word, as she turned a face of tremulous eagerness toward him, "Oh, James, do you believe that?"

"Those whom God has joined let no man put asunder—how can man ever put asunder what God has joined—ask yourself that." Then, as she still fixed him, lips parted, eyes dilated, drinking the words into her heart, he repeated the texts:

> Who said, Moses permitted a bill of divorce and to put her away.
>
> To whom Jesus answering said, Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you that precept. . . .
>
> A man shall . . . cleave to his wife and they two shall be in one flesh. . . . What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

"Because of the hardness of your heart," she repeated. "Ah, yes, that is it. But you think—what a blessed creed. Oh James, why were we not all born in that old faith of our ancestors!"

It was the echo, in far Italy, of Ian's cry on the highland moor.

The priest's brows contracted. He had a stern rectitude of soul with that over-tender heart. "Don't think," he said gravely, "that my faith, the old faith, wise and blessed as it is, makes life easier, or smooths the path for human passion. In your case—yes, in your case, the rule under which you would have had to bend, and which, my dear, you would have then perhaps fiercely resented, would, it is true, have proved indeed blessed and wise. But there are many conceivable cases where this very ordinance seems the extreme of hardship."

"You mean," she said, "that two might love as we did, not married, bound by other ties, knowing it is too late. Oh, no—it was because of all those years, those sacred years together. There is something in that love of married life, James, I cannot put it into words, custom grows precious, dependence and interdependence—the bond that I broke!"

She had unerringly laid her finger on the truth as he himself believed it.

"Yet there are unhappy marriages," he said. "Nevertheless," he paused, then went on musingly, "my dear, it's like a fire, the fire on the hearth which warms the home. The church—my church—not only permits it, but blesses it, is glad of it. But her children must be content to let it glow on the hearth; it must not be lit in the middle of the room to burn the house down; or pilfered and carried away into corners—" he broke off with a whimsical smile on his melancholy face. "I am preaching you a sermon——"

She smiled back at him. She was sure that was just



the kind of homely talk he gave that poor flock of his—hesitating simple phrases. James was no rhetorician. Very few would guess the mystic flame which consumed his soul and shone only in his eyes. As she gazed at him in his shabby black, affectionately conned his ugly, emaciated face—stamped now with sorrow, lined and tired—met the gaze of wide compassion in those understanding, luminous, inspired eyes, remembered his chosen life of unremitting toil and self-sacrifice; remembered too the unsullied innocence of his youth, she said to herself: "James is a saint."

It seemed to her that an evil thought had never shadowed his mind. How dark her own passion-tossed soul was beside his!

Presently he rose to go. He was anxious, he told her, to write a line to Ian. She flushed, then blanched, as she stood; her eyes questioned.

"I do not forget," he said, "that all you have told me is, as it were, under the seal. You have not said if you have altered your mind—whether you wish me——"

She put her hand to her head.

"I don't know. I must think it out."

"That is best. I will tell him only one thing: that you are here alone. It is better to let him hear all that has happened by degrees—if he is to know it, and—" he hesitated, "I think I should like to tell him myself, not to write. It's all very difficult."

She gave a heavy sigh: "Yes."

"That will be wiser," he went on. "I can stay just a couple of days more here, if I have to go back to Scotland. And you can think it out and let me know."

Then he added, after a pause: "I will write to Mrs. Inglis, too, and tell her to give you constant news."

She thanked him with a look. She was, he felt, concentrated upon the inner thoughts.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN he went back to his *osteria* the ruddy hostess met him in her tangled garden. She was whipping up the linen where it lay outspread on the tamarisk bushes.

"The rain is coming," she cried, pointing to a bank of clouds from the west. "To have to wash twice—I thank you!"

"After so beautiful a morning?" said the guest.

"Too beautiful!" she answered succinctly; hoisted her basket on her head, and walked, superbly balanced, up the path before him.

The rain came as she had foretold—long swathing mists from the sea, sucking all brightness and color out of the world; drawing, veil upon veil, across the sky, and condensing into relentless drip. A small wind began sighing in company. As the day went on it grew fierce and wild; and by the afternoon it was lamenting with the anger of the sea in it. The tamarisk and the fuchsia huddled away before it; and the orange groves tossed their heavy fruit-laden boughs; the aloe leaves knocked against each other with a rattle of armor.

To this saddened humor of the outer world James wrote his letters. It was no very easy task, that letter to Ian.

How to convey the comfort and reassurance he was longing to give without betraying confidence. How touch at all upon a question so delicate, so fraught with anguish without hurting somewhere.

After pondering long, at last he wrote these few lines:

My Dear Ian,

I am writing from the little town where Morna lives. I found Signor Concini in Paris, quite easily, as you said I would. And he gave me this address. Morna has been here all the time. She is quite alone. People think she is a widow. She lives like a widow. I will stay two or three days longer here, as I do not like to leave Morna again so soon. And then I will come straight to you.

I cannot write more fully to you. Only this I will add; when last we met you spoke of a chance of re-union in eternity. Dear, dear Ian, I can say this. There is nothing lying between you and Morna to part you in eternity.

Your loving brother.

To Mrs. Inglis, James wrote more at length, without, however, revealing so much. He spoke of Morna and her present mode of life, her solitude and sadness, her anxiety about Ian. And he begged Mrs. Inglis to write and give news of the invalid; and otherwise show friendship and kindness where it was so much needed.

These letters written, he went out, through the blast, to post them; fought his way, buffetted and streaming, to the church which he had all to himself, and back again to his attic. He had resolved not to return to Morna that

day; he felt that it was wise to leave her to face her problem alone.

But, even as the bells of Santa Maddalena's two churches were ringing out the Ave Maria, against each other, the wind now rushing away with the clamor, now bringing it loudly to the ear, there came a summons to him which of necessity altered instantly his whole plan of action. From the squalid, seething struggling corner of London which was his parish, it had reached up to the wild heather-clad, pine-spiced solitudes of his native land, and hence come pulsing to these Italian crags.

It was a summons which claimed unhesitating obedience. Within a few minutes of reading it, he packed his bag, donned his worn overcoat and went down to settle his account and ascertain what train would take him back to Genoa in time for the night express. He found he had something over an hour. He would spend it with Morna. He walked out into the wet night, the old plaid rug over his arm—the only bit of all his gallant Highland appanage that he could still allow himself—carrying his unimportant luggage.

Up on the higher spaces, the wind and rain caught him fiercely. With bent head he battled his way through. It was the flickering and leaping flame of the solitary gas lamp by the church entrance that guided him to the door of the Casa Benedetto, where the old peasant woman came out and answered his knock, all a-bustle with curiosity and anticipation.

The ruddy light through the kitchen door fell upon the priest's pale face—her own reflected disappointment. She might have known it was only the Reverend Father—but

yet, who could think it, on such a night. And then she perceived his luggage, clapped her hands and exclaimed, half-angrily: "Was his reverence then about to honor the house with his company—the Excellency had said nothing. But that was like her. What departing? Departing this night. *Dio mio!*"

Time pressed, he told her, and so, shrugging her shoulders, she relieved him of his bag, laid summary hands upon his wet overcoat; and having done all that could be required of her, jerked her thumb in the direction of the stairs.

He found Morna bending over the lamp-lit table, her head on her hand. She was writing. On the hearth, where the wood-fire was burning low, two or three crumpled written sheets lay charred where she had flung them.

Behind the half-closed shutters the window was unlatched, and, as he came in, the gust rushed across toward him, nearly extinguishing the lamp, and setting the fine wood ash dancing into the room.

"You, James?"

She looked at him, first without emotion; her mind so concentrated on her own thoughts, that she seemed scarcely to realize anything unexpected in his coming.

He closed the door.

"I am here to say good-bye, Morna."

"Good-bye?" She dropped her pen and rose hastily. "Why?"

"I got a telegram." She swayed and caught at the chair behind her. "Oh, no, nothing about Ian," he cried, shocked at his own stupidity. "Only just about myself. I've got to get back to my work."

She sat down again, as if dazed.

"Oh, James—what a pity!" Then her brain began to work. "What a pity," she repeated in a different tone. "What shall I do? I did think I should have had one more day with you—and more time . . . "

He came and sat beside her. She caught up quickly, coloring as she did so, the sheet she had been writing on, folded it and glanced, hesitating, first at him and then at the fire.

The wind came whistling round the corner of the little house, and fled with a long roar like the voice of many waters down the groves of the valley, and died away. And in the pause he could hear the patter of the rain among the vine leaves.

It struck him suddenly that here was the most solitary creature on the face of this earth.

"I thought, perhaps," she said, and her voice hesitated even as had her glance a moment before, "that if I wrote a letter, you could have brought it to him. Now I don't know— No. I see it's impossible." She rose and went over to the hearth. He followed her and arrested the movement by which she would have cast the letter she held on to the embers.

"Do not be in such haste," he said. "Perhaps it would be the best way that he should hear it from you."

She looked at him a little while without speaking.

"Ah, no," she said, very gently. "I thought of that, too. But I couldn't." She dropped the paper into the fire as she spoke. It slid from the log, and fell, twisting and curling as it opened. Gazing unconsciously upon it, he saw the words "My own Ian—my own, own love,"

black against the flame, disappear in the flame. "I wrote nothing there," she went on, "about all that nightmare time. I've been trying to, but I couldn't. I burned them all—letters and letters—I couldn't get it written. And when you came in—" Her voice shook. "I was only saying—" she broke off, her lip quivering.

"My own Ian. . . . my own, own love!" Why had she cast it, then, into the flames? "Why," he began aloud; but she interrupted hurriedly: "Ah, no, I couldn't. Don't you see? Not now. In my heart, before God, I may. You say I may. But to write it now—I couldn't—now."

He saw that she could not speak the name of the other woman. Not even allude to her existence—the new wife rose up there, before them both, and James was dumb.

"It's my punishment," she said in a whisper.

Somewhere, far away from inland, in a lull of the blast, came a broken music of bugles—hurried, joyous, panting, urging, the very lilt of eager feet. Then the wind surged up from the sea and drowned it.

"I shall never be but a stranger here. Did you hear? Those are the Bersaglieri returning from the hills. It makes me feel such an alien. Think of the skirl of the pipes. . . . Even on this night, when it blows and storms, one can't get away from the strangeness. There it is again —don't you feel it tell you what an exile you are from your own country—from our Highlands, James? Listen, Oh! how gay . . . how heartrending!"

The sound was nearing. Gay, as she had said, gay as a dance measure, and, by reason of it, heartrending to them both.

"They're for the station," thought James, and looked at his watch. She saw the action:

"Oh, James, must you go? Can't you put it off, just for a day. You two, Ian and you, are all I ever had—you've been so good to me . .. ."

She caught his hand as she spoke. Clasping hers he shook his head.

"My dear, no more than any one of those soldiers could refuse to run to that bugle call, can I neglect this summons."

He released her to seek in his breast pocket for the telegram. In his painstaking way he wanted her to see for herself that he had his orders.

"It was Mrs. Inglis who telegraphed. It was remiss of me. I had forgotten to send my substitute in St. Michael's my new address. And there is something about Ian. It sounds—yes, I think it sounds hopeful. Shall I read it to you? Kind soul, it is a long telegram to have sent abroad.

> So sorry your substitute ill wire cannot continue duty impossible replace. Fear you must return for Sunday Ian rest-cure. INGLIS.

Morna bent her head in silence. The minutes were slipping by. They had come to no conclusion.

"Then you cannot after all get up to him?"

"Not immediately, I fear. But perhaps in the middle of the week."

"If there was urgency you could go?"

"Oh, yes, I hope so. It would have to be managed.

Morna—what—I'll go as soon as I can, anyhow—what am I to say to him?"

She became painfully agitated.

"Oh, I don't know—" she wrung her hands. "James, if you tell him how it came to pass, that I found out—Oh, James, it would be casting it up at him, in his weakness. I'd rather," her accents were broken, "I'd rather he still thought me—rather anything than that he should reproach himself."

"But, Morna—" he was troubled.

"Nothing can be undone—I only want him spared, spared every way."

"My dear, I understand. But there is just this. Would it not be better for him to know? Must he not know, indeed, to put himself straight with his own conscience—with God?"

"Oh, James, if he forgave me—thinking me guilty—will not God forgive him?"

He was profoundly moved.

"Child," he said, "let us leave it for the moment. We shall be shown what to do. Yes—" his voice grew firm again—"just trust and wait for guidance. And now," he added, "I must go."

"I'll go with you—" she cried.

"This wet night?"

"Don't prevent me, James."

"But the way back alone——"

"Must I not always be alone now, and here there is no one to hurt me. It's twenty minutes more of my kin. I won't be robbed of that!"

She hurried out of the room, and almost instantly re-

turned wrapped in the wide peasant cloak of rough cloth she had worn last night on the balcony. It seemed to him as if already a great distance of time separated them from that sunset hour.

The scurrying troop of Bersaglieri had just tramped past at their mountain trot—clarions breathlessly dancing them on; the whole jingling stamping mass with its maddening rhythm rolled down the hill before them and was swallowed in the darkness of the night. The blast, roaring up from the bay, engulfed in the tunneled road, brought the cry of the bugles back and back again in fitful clamors. All at once, it fell silent, and only the anger of sea and wind filled the night.

Neither James nor Morna attempted speech. As they trudged down the hill together, each knew the other's thought too well; and there are times when sorrow weighs with so heavy a languor on the spirit that it sickens from the effort of words.

When the small station came into sight below them, they looked down upon a strange spectacle. The platform lights were shining on the drenched company of soldiers and in their floating cock plumes, and short capes, they glistened like some swarm of monstrous beetles in the rain.

The train was already drawn up; and, as the travelers advanced, the small eager men were tumbling into the carriages with extraordinary alertness. There was a buzz, a clamor in the air, of all their merry voices.

James decided to treat himself to the luxury of the only first-class carriage as far as Genoa, and stood by its open door, with Morna close beside him, waiting till he should have to take his seat. Two officers were advancing toward

it, but paused with the innate courtesy of the Italian and waited apart. Both glanced curiously at the tall woman with the white face under the hood of the peasant cloak, and James caught the words which the elder dropped to the younger.

"*Inglesi,*" and then "*Com é bella!*"

As the first door was banged, at the end of the line, Morna suddenly spoke.

"Dear James, it is good-bye. Write to me! You, at least, I may see sometimes. Tell Ian—" she choked, put her hand to her lip and shook her head. The tears welled up, rolled down her cheeks; slow, heavy tears.

She bent toward him.

"If he dies—don't let him die without knowing——"

The conductor approached, bustling and calling out. James stepped back to make way for the officers who touched their hats to the lady as they passed; then he had to get in in his turn. But he leaned out of the window. She stood looking up at him.

"Take care of yourself," he cried.

"Oh, I'm strong," she answered with a forlorn smile.

The whistle sounded. She came closer, still looking up intently.

The train moved, and silently, relentlessly, they were parted.

He took that vision of her face away with him. To leave her like that out in the night, in the storm, to think of her, solitary, toiling back up the hill, to the solitary house, a stranger amongst strangers, Morna, who had been the center of home, the heart of life, the joy of their eyes!

And what was it she had wanted to say, at the very last, what word had those lips parted to breathe out to him.

The officer, opposite to him, brown-faced, black mustached, quick of glance and gesture, surveyed him curiously.

At last he held out an open cigar case. "Would the reverend gentleman care to smoke? It was a dreary night." James declined the offer, drawing away with his native reserve. It is difficult to daunt Southern affability. The officer apologized. He trusted he was not indiscreet. Sometimes tobacco was soothing—when, for instance, one was low in one's spirits. The reverend pastor must excuse him—there were things no one could escape noticing—and partings were full of sorrow. The lady seemed greatly distressed. "Your wife, sir?" He knew something about England's clergymen.

"I am a Catholic priest," said James dryly, his sensitive face flushing.

"Ten thousand pardons. Ah, the lady then is a sister?"

"My brother's wife."

"Ah—" now the officer knew. "A widow! She has the face of a widow. Sad, sad! So young and beautiful. A widow, I am right in this, am I not?"

James was silent for a moment, without replying. Then he said slowly: "You are right, sir—she is widowed."





BOOK IV

"First a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast.
O thou soul of my soul I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!"

R. Browning.



CHAPTER I

ST. MICHAEL'S, in a fog with the red flare of its Carron torches painted against the vapor, its ceaseless activities rolling and roaring up unseen through the gloom; the fitful shifting and vanishing of lights; its sudden pictures abruptly gaping in high colors, out of the swirl—has a certain dreadful magnificence. It is hideousness defined by its own intensity.

Indoors, however, sordidness reigns unrelieved. On such a day any small, dismal house is ten times more dismal. Those energies of toil that, outside, pursue their unremitting way, stimulated to unusual joviality by the very stress of difficulties—is London traffic ever more clamorous than in a fog?—intensify the muffled sense of isolation within, where the thick air lies like a pall on every sense.

The lodging of the mission priest at St. Michael's had perhaps never worn a less inviting aspect than on this day of gloom, when he returned, bewildered from long travel. And one-eyed Mary, whose garments might have been London grime in woof and web, whose besmutted countenance wore its most plaintive air of disapproval, gave him—for some occult reason known only to her tribe—the sourest of welcomes.

Yet, in spite of all, James MacIvor had a sense of home-coming. This shabby room of his held more peace for him than any spot on earth, unless, indeed, the shabby tin church, out there in the fog. Here duty met him. Duty, stern and most tender leader; she that grips outwardly with such iron relentlessness, and in secret so fragrantly rewards. Here all his personal anguish, the pressure of his intimate trouble must be laid down, as it were before the Altar. That other burden which awaited him in those screaming, swirling, struggling streets of night without, must be again taken up manfully. The souls of Morna and of Ian, intensely beloved as they were, were no longer his immediate concern. His concern was here with his miserable flock, the lame, the strayed, the lost—poor black sheep most of them—to him, now, home and brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, lands for the Name of Christ.

And so, during the dreadful meal, which Mary, sniffing untold grievance, slammed on the table before him, it was the accumulated parish correspondence that he set his tired eyes to scan—beginning with a pessimistic document from his substitute, ending with a last begging scrawl from Paradise Row.

There was a square white envelope, marked with Mrs. Inglis' clear handwriting. He picked it out of the squalid heap and laid it aside until all other claims should have been attended to.

But, before he could feel free to lay hands upon it, there came a sick call.

"Musha, and I'm sure," said old Mary, as the slamming of the little door warned her of her master's departure,

"it's enough to break my heart, so it is!" She surveyed the lump of blackened steak, left untasted on the chipped plate, and returned it angrily to the dish: "And me that was out in the cruel fog to get it for him, catching me death of cold and all! I'll be having him sick on me hands next! Wurra, who'd be housekeeper to a houly man? I'll be apt to be mincing it for his supper, I'm thinking!"

From the dying woman in the tenement, Father MacIvor had to go straight to the church, and thence to interview Brodie. It was late when he returned, and he had hardly had time to swallow that cup of tea for which his exhausted anatomy panted, when he was again summoned to the bedside of the old Irishwoman, who, said the messenger, was "going this time—and sure, it would break her heart, the creature, to quinch without the priest beside her—but she won't disappoint your riverence again!" he added consolingly.

It was ten of that night, therefore, before James opened the Scotch letter. And so wearied was he that he had to fix the page over and over, before he could focus the writing.

> I really was more sorry than I can say (wrote Mrs. Inglis, in her discursive way) when I had to send you on that telegram, dear, good James. I think it most unhandsome of the saints to let influenza break out—and most tiresome of the Father Guardian not to have found another substitute. But, poor things, if they were all ill, I suppose he couldn't help it; and, no doubt, it's all for some good purpose, though we can't see it here.
>
> It was such a comfort to hear that you had dis-

covered poor Morna's address; and still more that you know she is alone! (This was underlined twice.) Your letter from Paris, short as it was, was an immense relief. I confess I am most anxious, and not a little curious, to know more, and how you found the poor, dear child. How sad it all is—it really quite breaks my heart!

James could almost hear the melancholy gurgle which must have accompanied the penning of this line.

And now, I am sure, you must want to hear about Ian. I must tell you, dear James, that the day after you left—I couldn't help it, the Bishop may say what he likes—I trotted up to Stronaven. They wouldn't let me see Ian; I suppose that was only natural. Neither did I see [she had written "Mrs. MacIvor," but had crossed it out and substituted "the new chatelaine."] But I saw her mother. My dear boy, that is a very disagreeable woman. I can't say I got on with her at all. Would you believe it—the house-party has only just left, though I believe the Duchess went away the day you did.

Mrs. Duvenant condescended to tell me they had had a consultation about Ian; and that, as far as she knew, he was much the same. She tossed her head a good deal, and seemed dreadfully injured, whether because we never called or because of Ian being ill, I can't say.

The young woman was resting, her mother said, because they'd been up so late the last night of the party.

Well, James, that was all for that day. But, as

I said to Robert, I was not going to be driven away from the house of our sick friend by a Mrs. Duvenant. And so, my dear boy, I just marched over there once more yesterday. That is to say, Robert drove me there in the car. I am glad to say there is rather good news about Ian. At least, I gather that Sir Duncan Ord was quite reassuring. As I wired to you, Ian is having a rest-cure—a very severe one—two nurses, poor fellow! They won't allow him to see anyone, speak or move. And Oh, my dear James, I saw Mrs., I mean the little, young thing. Such a child! It does seem sad! Really, as I said to Robert, driving back, it's heartbreaking. Such a pretty little thing, with such sweet manners. Of course, I've no doubt quite frivolous and empty-headed—and, indeed, how any girl not a complete pagan could marry a man in Ian's situation—well, well. She made us have tea and was as nice as possible. She was very communicative, asked us to come again. Poor child, she hasn't the *least* idea of the *seriousness* of Ian's illness, and is quite *ready* to believe everything they say to reassure her. She was as cheerful as possible. It made me quite sad.

It's when we came back that we found that tiresome telegram calling you home. And now I'm writing this to meet you on your return in London. Do write me a long, full account of everything. . . .

The sheet fluttered from James' hand. He sat staring into his dying fire. The fog was denser and yellower than ever; and a thick silence was now gathering also, without. Only from that corner where the public-house lights still shone, beckoning through the fog, inter-

mittent raucous sounds broke through the universal muffling lethargy.

Those sunlit hours in the orange garden, with Morna, seemed a far-away fantastic dream. Still further away, that night on the hillside, when Ian had stormed his heart out under a sky of such divine peace. This chosen life of his was the reality. . . . Old dead Biddy, in the sordid room, where her three bereaved relatives were philosophically disposing themselves to slumber, while a neighbor professed to watch, with the help of a bottle of gin—James felt but too certain of that bottle of gin—out there, where the week's earnings, where health and self-respect were being flung across the counter by some hopeless Jack, Pat or Sandy—foggy nights were very bad nights in Paradise Row—this was his real life. These were his sisters and his brethren.

But even upon the stern renunciation of this thought, he stooped and picked up the letter, sought out and re-read a particular phrase. Underlying Mrs. Inglis' cheerful attempts at reassurance, conviction again forced itself upon him; she had no hope for Ian.

Since the night on the moor, when he had laid his hand on that frenzied heart, he himself had lost all hope.

Then he began to wonder whether, in the circumstances described by Mrs. Inglis, Ian would be allowed to receive his own letters—whether those tidings of comfort, from Santa Maddalena, had ever reached the tormented spirit.

He was aware how ruthlessly modern science enforces each new system of treatment. At any time, he told himself, Ian's restless temper could not have brooked such an

ordeal. But, as matters now stood—was it not destroying his last chance?

It is difficult even for the most purely apostolic to eliminate the natural claims. It was of Ian, of Ian that James thought all through this first night. It was for him he prayed, for him he travailed in his soul.

And the whole of the next day, while loyally and patiently going through the allotted task, the image of his brother was a spectral presence at the back of every thought. His poor human need cried out to him, rang louder in his ears than any call of immediate duty.

On the Monday after his return, the orange envelope of a telegram flashed at him from his breakfast table, as he came back from his Mass. He saw it with no surprise—it was only the materializing of an ever-present apprehension—but none the less with a dreadful sinking of the heart. He felt he was summoned. Could he in conscience obey the call? Other deathbeds might claim him this very day—yet he had promised Morna. He tore open the envelope.

> Come at once. Ian given up. He asks for you.
>
> OENONE.

Even as he stood staring, cold anguish upon him, torn between his own most scrupulous notions of spiritual honor, and the cry of the blood, of the love that pulsed in it, there came a frantic ring at his bell; and, with unusual alacrity, the housekeeper entered bearing a second telegram. She was all agog with curiosity.

"I thought his Riverence would have dropped at me feet," she narrated afterwards to an interested neighbor.

A second message, so soon after the first, could have but one terrible import. But, as with shaking fingers he tore the envelope open, and read, it was as if the iron band that clamped his heart fell away. The telegram was from Mrs. Inglis.

> Poor Ian very bad. Think you had better come at once. Am arranging our Father Murphy replace you. He starts early tomorrow.

Kind good woman that she was, ever ready with the common-sense of practical charity! She had never done a truer deed of neighborly love.

With a calmer mind, he was now able to read the first message again and noticed that both were dated overnight from Ballocheroch. He was free to start at once.

The east wind which had brought its unwontedly early spell of fog over London had shifted today to the large south-westerly sweeps that come rushing from the Atlantic and bring, even in mid-October, warmth on their wings. Phalanxes of low clouds marched the skies all day long, as James forged northward. Now and again pale yellow sunshine would break through the rifts, and then the shadows of those great advancing armies swept across the land at wonderful speed.

Somewhere, south of Carlisle, with a frantic opposition of colliding roars, north and south expresses thundered past each other. The burly Irish priest, who was slumbering

so comfortably in the corner of his carriage, crossed all unconsciously his Scotch comrade, wakeful and hollow-eyed, whose burden he was hastening the length of the Kingdom to shoulder for a while.

Over the border, through a passing rain squall, into a sunset which turned every heaped cloud into crimsoning pyres; then through the swift dusk—night falling, it seemed, all the more rapidly because of that wantonness of glory—through deepening gloom; clattering and clamoring into Edinburgh at last.

Edinburgh! James thought of his mad father, and of his unblessed length of days. . . . Life, there, dragging on, without honor, without profit, while Ian, splendor of manhood, wrecked in soul and body, was foundering into a premature grave!

On, on into the night ground the iron wheels. And through the traveler's tired brain began to press now an unending procession of those figures whose tragedy had been his country's history. Surely Scotland, thy very name is tragedy, thought he. How shall thy sons escape their doom? Murdered chiefs and murdered kings, betrayed and betraying: valor unavailing: genius and gallantry ending on the scaffold. . . . Montrose in the Tolbooth, Claverhouse falling, the sword of victory snapping in his hand; hapless Mary, whose very charm was crime . . . Young Gordon lying in his blood on the banks of Don—so beautiful in death that his comrades, kissing his face and hands with tears, forgot their bloody triumph. . . . The young Chevalier, once inspiration of loyalty, breath of romance itself, degraded and unmourned, a tipsy exile under alien skies. . . . Glencoe valley with its haunt-

ing screams. The dark terror of Glamis. The successive falls of the great houses . . . the scattering of the clans—a stained book and a doleful! Its pages reeked of plot and feud, ruthless vengeance, treacheries! . . . What could the end of the chronicle be but disaster? . . . Aye, and was it not the old, wild Highland spirit that had animated both Ian's and Morna's hearts against each other; that had bidden them strike and make reprisal, to their own destruction?

It was past midnight when he arrived at the junction. He was uncertain whether he would not have to wait for the first morning train on the branch line. But on the great echoing platform he was almost immediately accosted by Mr. Inglis' chauffeur. He had wired from Euston both to Stronaven and Craigstoun announcing his departure. Here was another instance of the manner in which these kindly unobtrusive people put the second great precept of the Law into practice.

"Mrs. Inglis," said the man, "bid me say that the Master is much the same. She thought you would like to go straight to the Castle, Father."

Though James gathered a sense of urgency through the guarded words of Mrs. Inglis' message, his sad heart warmed at this proof of constant friendship.

It was a twenty-five mile drive; and the Craigstoun chauffeur—the elderly pious coachman of yore—was nothing if not cautious. The traveler knew he must have patience for the better part of two hours.

The last stray town lamp was soon left behind, and it was through an almost palpable darkness that they sped, the shaft of the searchlights painting in transient fantastic

silverspoint all the familiar features of the roadside. Even the village of Dalrioch, every stone of which he knew by heart, looked alien and ghostly in the cold flying gleam. Each little stone house was wrapt in slumber.

Lights glimmered beside the great entrance gates of the park of Stronaven; and at the first hoot they were promptly swung back. The long rises and dips of the avenue were devoured in noiseless haste, and soon yellow gleams at different heights among the trees, showed that Stronaven was awake and on the watch.

It was with an indescribable feeling that James crossed the threshold of his home. It would have been easier, he thought, to enter it, knowing it so soon to be the house of death, had it still stood in the simplicity that had sheltered his childhood. But to find this garish, trivial luxury, these audacities of a degenerate taste crowding about human anguish and the Great Mystery, was well-nigh unendurable.

A coward fear seized him by the heart. He did not dare question, even by a look, the servant who had admitted him. The fellow wore a countenance fitted to the circumstances; but did not altogether conceal the sense of his own condescension toward the shabby priest. Having declined an offer of refreshment James was informed that Mrs. MacIvor was expecting him. And midway up the winding stairs, Oenone herself came out on the landing to meet him.

Her first words were an apology.

"I'm real sorry," she began in her soft southern voice. "I don't know how I could have been so stupid not to have thought of sending for you myself. My goodness, to

think of poor Mrs. Inglis being the one to remember it—with our three cars outside there, doing nothing. I'm just wild with myself."

Her warm hands drew him into the absurd room.

"Ian—how is he?" He had to ask, and he had to hear; and he knew only too well in his heart, the while.

She gave him a swift glance; it held pity and doubt—not for herself, but for him.

"You are prepared," went on the soft accents, "aren't you, James—we agreed I'd call you James, didn't we?" She could smile here. She smiled kindly. "I should hate to have to break it to you——"

His eyes spoke for him before he said—abruptly, it was such an effort:

"I am quite prepared—for anything."

"Oh, well; the doctor says it can't last, poor fellow. Not more than a few days at the outside. Oh, do sit down, James. You look real tired. What do you say?"

He had to moisten his dry lips before they could form the words properly: "Can I go to him, now?"

"Now?" She looked blank. "I thought we'd have a little talk first. He's asleep, I believe. There isn't any such danger as that, you know." Her face brightened: "I'll tell you what. I'll send my maid to ask the nurse, the one who is sitting up with him. Do sit down."

She rang the bell and gave her order. As the door closed on the sleepy girl, Oenone leaned forward and said in a low voice—there was a sudden suppressed excitement about her: "There's one thing I must tell you first of all; I've telegraphed for Morna!"

James lifted his head quickly and looked at her. He

doubted the evidence of his senses. She nodded. There was an innocent triumph on her face.

"Yes—" she said, answering his glance of incredulous astonishment, "yesterday afternoon I made up my mind. I telegraphed to her hours before I telegraphed to you."

"But"—he put an uncertain hand to his bewildered head—"my dear child, how did you even know . . . ?"

She interrupted him with eagerness.

"You wrote, you know." She flung an arch look upon him. "Oh, well, I'm not altogether a complete idiot. I can put two and two together, now and again, James, and that queer little body, Mrs. Inglis, has been here—Oh, so mysterious about your journey, but she let out you'd gone to Italy. And so—he's been having a rest-cure, you know, poor fellow, not that it has been a success. No, indeed, a pretty big mistake I call it—but they kept his letters back."

James gave an exclamation.

"Did he not get my letter? I was afraid of this."

"Don't I tell you they kept them back. That's where the mischief came in. That's just what finished it all. I said to Sir Duncan Ord—we wired for him again, you know—'If you'd treated him like a rational being and given him his letters . . . '"

Here the maid reappeared and announced:

"Nurse, she say the Master, he sleep. Nobody, nobody must come."

Oenone dismissed the messenger with an imperious gesture and turned alertly back to her visitor.

"Where was I?" she exclaimed.

He was sitting in forced quietude, striving to control

the sense of agitation and urgency which was within him, and which was intensified by his fatigue. It was imperative he should understand the situation; but her artless divagations tried him sorely. And over there, in the old tower, his brother lay dying, and every instant of time here wasted was weighted with the importance of eternity.

"Where was I?" she repeated a little irritably.

"You said the doctor—" he prompted.

"Oh, yes, I told him straight out it was all his fault. They kept me away, you know, not that he wanted to see me, poor fellow, I quite understood. But if I'd been seeing him it couldn't have happened like that. But there, what's the good? The nurses and the doctors were having it all their own way. Oh, it wasn't so very long—a couple of days, I suppose. But he got into a frenzy. And two or three nights ago, nurse was asleep—she's gone, that one—well, he just got up and out of bed and was all over the place, looking for his letters. And I had them locked up safe in my bureau—I thought I ought to, you know." She stopped with her appealing smile. A groan escaped the priest's lips. His poor tormented Ian!

"Oh, well—" there was a faint quiver in her voice. That and her smile had a pathos more unnerving perhaps to him who sat there, than the natural spectacle of tears. "You can guess—he was so weak somehow and they'd been keeping him—Oh, I don't quite understand—low on purpose to relieve the heart. Anyhow he got another attack. When that fool nurse woke up and gave the alarm—they thought he was dying right off and fetched me!"

She paused, shifted herself uneasily among her cushions and then went on hurriedly. James saw how her whole

being swerved away from the memory of that painful hour. "He was unconscious pretty well all day. They got him round. Then, Oh, I suppose he was a bit delirious; he kept on saying: 'My letter, my letter.' And I understood, you see, not being, as I told you, James, altogether as much a fool as people might think——"

Again the smile, and the repressed tremor in her voice moved the listener.

"So," she resumed—and now a kind of sprightly satisfaction was in her tones, "I just fetched that letter, James. I won't say I had not looked pretty often at it—having, as I said, a pretty good guess at what it was about—and brought it up to him. And then—" She hesitated, wincing once more, and went on hurriedly: "Poor fellow, he could only just open it—but he couldn't read it. He didn't seem able to. So I—I just turned them out of the room, nurses and doctors, all together, and I read it to him myself.

"You read it to him? You?"

"Word by word. Yes. And twice over, James. Your letter. And then—Oh, well, it came to me what I had to do. Poor fellow! I couldn't let anyone die like that," she added, almost apologetically. "Well, after all, he was my husband."

She leaned forward. Her pretty face looked wan, marked with lines of delicacy and fatigue.

She wore a gleaming brocade wrapper; the richness of its hues, interwoven with gold, threw her pallor into stronger relief. Her lips suddenly drooped at the corners.

"He wants her—Oh, so dreadfully! I don't understand anybody wanting anybody like that. But I can't bear to

see it. It seems to hurt somehow. I just had to telegraph. And, after all," she straightened herself and leaned back wearily, "why shouldn't I? If I don't mind, well, it's nobody else's business."

Then she added: "Nobody knows."

He made an abrupt movement.

"Not Ian?"

"I didn't dare tell Ian. My goodness, he might have died right off, and her coming!"

"Is she coming?"

"I've got her telegram here: 'Starting at once.' She ought to be here tomorrow night—I have reckoned. I have a kind of notion somehow," proceeded the second Mrs. MacIvor, "that she is just as bad as he is—in her way. It seems all kind of queer. I feel as if I was in a dream!"

She laughed. It was a small forlorn sound. James rose, came to the sofa, and caught one of the little languid hands.

"God bless you—Oenone," he said, choking. And as she stared at him with widening eyes, he went on with difficulty: "You have done something great—something that is sure to bring a blessing."

"Oh, well!" Her lip drooped. She drew her hand away. Then she said pettishly, "Mummie will be fit to kill me. Not that I mind, really."

She got up, yawning. "I'd better go to bed, I suppose. It's an awful time of night, isn't it? And unless one's doing things—well, amusing things—it seems to wear one out." She stood stretching her long, slender arms and yawning again, with no more self-consciousness than some gracile animal.

James thought those eccentrically cut, shimmering draperies showed as incongruously against her air of white fatigue as did Monsieur Poiret's fantastic designs in this house of doom.

"I've told them to get ready for you a room near Ian. I thought you'd like it like that," she said on the edge of her last yawn. "It used to be Ian's dressing-room, I think. Good night, James. I'm glad you've come." She yawned again. "Oh, dear, I'm half asleep."

She was moving toward the door which led to her own apartments when, arrested by a sudden thought, she paused and came back to him and said, with the most absolute simplicity:

"I don't know if Mummie told you. I'm going, it seems, to have a little baby——"

The trick of speech, by which she divided with her slight alien accent, certain words, gave a pitiful quaintness to her phrase. "You know, I see." Her quick wits were the vividest part of her personality. "Don't be sorry for me. I'm rather glad, I think. I'd be very fond of a little baby. And then, if it's a boy, of course—" she broke off, pulled vaguely at a many-colored bobble on her sleeve and went on, into that silence of his which he himself felt clamorous with trouble: "I'll have had something out of it, anyhow. And I can't help feeling, as Sir Duncan Ord says, it would be worse for poor Ian to linger and to suffer. And worse for me. I can't—I couldn't—" the babyish droop of the mouth pointed to thrust back tears, "I couldn't go on like this, seeing him, poor fellow!"

Her pity shifted, it was for herself the tears had been ready to flow. For him there was that impersonal kindli-



ness. He was only that to her: "Poor fellow!" And the recurrent refrain exactly showed the place her dying husband had in the singular little creature's emotions.

"I know," she began again, and even in its plaintiveness her voice had a certain underlying matter-of-fact tone, "everybody is always dreadfully sorry when they see a young widow, in the way I am, but—it won't really be so bad. I suppose nothing's really so bad, as long as you don't set to make it so. At least, if one keeps pretty well. And I am well-off, and that. And—well, I just won't let Mummy fuss me to death. I mean to start all right when —when it's all over here."

He stood listening, astounded. The audacity of her frankness was amazing; but still more amazing was the fact that she herself did not seem to regard it as in the least out of the way.

"I daresay I'm boring you," she exclaimed, with a swift look at him, "but I thought I'd just like you to know that you needn't worry about me. You've got enough to worry about, haven't you, James? Well, good night again."

She went slowly, dragging a serpent length of flashing brocade on the floor behind her. There was a gold tassel at the end of it, which bobbed fantastically. James gave a sigh from the depth of his overcharged heart, as he himself turned to take his opposite way. He could not feel angry. He could not even feel shocked. On other lips, her words would have been revolting; but, only a few minutes before, those same lips had revealed a deed of womanly compassion that, in anyone else, would have been heroic.

Was it only because she could not care, that she had

been so kind? No, he answered himself; the callous by nature are never kind at all. She was a child. She seemed to him still to be standing outside life, looking on with a child's wide-eyed curiosity, interested but not affected. Once again he thought what a singular stroke of fate it was that made this frail indifferent creature the central point of that awful cyclone of tragedy in which the hopes of Stronaven were engulfed.

James pushed open the swing-door that led to the east wing, and closed it behind him. It was here that the Duvenant embellishing hand had been stayed by bolt and key.

He had to tread with precaution for no thickness of carpet lay on the antique oak boards to deaden the sound of footsteps. There was light in the room allotted to him. He found Duncan the piper, standing statue-like by the side of his shabby portmanteau.

"I thocht," said the man, after a gesture of greeting, "ye'd mebbe let me be doing for you, Mr. James. I have your portmantel unstrapped." Then, without an inflection in his voice, without the quiver of a muscle on the rugged face, he went on. "Ye bid me mind the Master. But they wouldna let me bide. This is an unco strange place, nowadays, Mr. James. Wull you be giving me the key, sir? I'd hae been fain to tend the Master," he repeated. "But a' the Doctor bodies and leddy nurses, they'd no' let me near him. And I would be thinking he'd be sending for me." He paused; his eyes were full of a pain his tongue would never express. James knew himself close kin to this inarticulate soul.

"They were thinking they were doing for the best, Dun-

can, lad," said he, as he dropped into the straight-backed armchair before the fire, which showed, in every cunningly laid block of peat, the piper's loving service.

"Aye, nae doot, Mr. James, I'd no' be saying. But it would have seemed more natural-like for the Master to be cared for by his ain. And I wadna have slept on my watch!" The rough face had a sudden harsh twist, the rough voice took a deepened note. "They hae him lost—lost, Mr. James."

What could James say? He stared into the angry splendid smoulder of the peat. Yes, Ian was lost for this world. For the next, how would it fare?

"Wull you no' gie me your key, Sir," repeated the man doggedly. "You should be thinking of bed, for it's sair weary you're looking."

The other dived in his pocket and produced the key.

"But I'm not going to bed," he said, as he handed it.

"You're no'?"

"I'm waiting to go in to the Master."

Duncan, already on one knee beside the portmanteau, turned his head sharply; then he rose and came over to the hearth.

"Mr. James——"

"Yes, lad."

"Mr. James—you'll no' let them keep me out a'together?"

James paused; and then he said, very gently: "We shall be able to do what we like now—for the time that remains."

There was a heavy silence in the room; then the piper said, in a whisper:

"Is that the way of it?" and went back to his task.

Suddenly he lifted his head, with the movement of a dog pricking his ears.

"There's stirring, yonder," he said briefly.

James, with swift step, went to reconnoiter. As he emerged into the passage, the door of Ian's room opened, and the nurse came out.

"I was coming for you, Mr. MacIvor," she said in a low voice. "Could I have a few words with you? We must not talk out here."

She gave a significant look at the door she had left ajar behind her. He went back with her into his own room. She was a fresh-faced woman, astonishingly young it seemed to him for such a post, with the professionally cheerful manner of her class.

"My patient does not know of your arrival," she said, speaking quickly. "I have not told him. Well, he's rather drowsy and heavy, I did not care to rouse him, but—" though she was smiling pleasantly with white teeth, and her brisk, sprightly tones continued unwaveringly, there was a glint of human compassion in her eyes—"it wouldn't do the least harm, if you liked, to slip into the room quietly, and sit beside him. He'll probably get more alive to things in a little while, and if he sees you there quite naturally, there won't be any shock. They don't generally notice much at this stage. But if he wants to talk—then you can let him."

James nodded, and swallowed the horrible lump in his throat, and then asked:

"How is he? I mean, is he perceptibly worse?"

She hesitated for a moment before replying:

"We don't expect any serious change, well—not to-night, Mr. MacIvor. Of course you are aware—" her capable eyes scanned his face, "of the doctor's opinion."

Again James bowed his head. The nurse nodded at him brightly.

"I'll go to my own room. It's just opposite. If you want me, Mr. MacIvor, please call. I'll look in again, anyhow, in an hour."

With a whisk of crackling linen she was gone.

James paused on the threshold to look back at his foster brother.

"I'll not fail to send for you, lad," he said. "Go you and rest."

"I'll no rest, nae mair than yersel', Mr. James, till—the Master is at rest himself."

James pushed open the door of his brother's room and went softly in.

CHAPTER II

THE Master's room was but faintly lighted. In a screened-off corner by the fire the small shaded lamp was placed—evidently where the nurse had ensconced herself. The first thing that struck James as he entered was the scientific sick-room appearance of everything. The old four-post bed with its purple and silver hangings had been thrust away in a corner; the patient lay on a small iron bedstead in the center of the apartment; it stood unscreened, and the window was flung open and uncurtained. The arrangement told its tale of

anguished breathlessness; so, too, did the propped-up outline of the figure in the bed.

There was a pungent smell of aromatics. The whole place had an atmosphere of the business of illness that caught the newcomer at the heart. Between nurses and doctors, with the last discoveries in drugs, with oxygen and opiate, the doomed man was being helped and soothed along the final stage of his journey.

All that cold science could do for him was lavished here. But, till this moment, not a creature to watch in love beside him. Even Duncan had been driven from the room by the dictates of those wise ministers. No heart to spare the oppression of that wounded heart; no hand to clasp that hand wet with anguish; no breast on which to pillow that weary head, dizzy with hopeless, lonely thought. And, for the poor soul—nothing! Nay, worse than nothing. For here every effort was to lull the faculties, avert reflection, conceal the inevitable. Not one word of courage for the ear of the spirit in its awful failing; not one image of God's mercy to catch the dimming eye; much less the strengthening unction of the last consecrating rites. . . .

The priest sat down noiselessly close to the screen where, by a ray of light, he could, if necessary, read his breviary. He set himself to wait.

The wind moaned among the turrets, rushing now and again gustily against the old walls with muffled thunder, and falling away into its plaintive wuthering. The thrust-back curtains swept the boards with a mysterious murmur. The voice of the burn rose clamoring in the pauses of the wind. And through all these sounds there was that quick, short breathing from the bed, which so grieved the listener.

With each one of those panting breaths, the sands of that beloved life were slipping out ever more swiftly in the hourglass of time. He was not thirty-eight, and his tale was told, or all but told. His course was nearly run. To the sad watcher, however, the tragedy was less that of a world too early lost than that of an eternity too late reckoned with.

Somewhere, from the outer darkness, a clock rang leisurely the hour of two; and a minute later, from the tower room beyond, the strokes were repeated with thin, hasty tinkle. A startled night-bird blundered across the window, and with a wild cry flapped away into the black once more.

"Oh, comfortable friar!" came Ian's voice from the inner stillness of the room. And James, looking up, startled, saw through the shadows that the dark head was turned on the pillow, and felt upon himself the gaze of the unseen eyes.

"Give us a little more light, Father James," went on the weak voice. "I'll be glad to see your ugly old face again— Yes, Jimmy, lad, I'm a pretty scarecrow, I expect."

"Oh, Iannie!"

It was all, out of his full heart, that James could say. He shifted the screen as bidden, and, lifting the lamp, carried it behind Ian's bed. Then he approached and took the thin hand. It closed, fevered and eager, upon his. That hand so soon to be cold and still.

Never, in all his life, had James felt the misery of the tongue-tied so keenly as at this moment. He stood look-

ing down at his brother, mourning over him, yearning over him; and to his lips speech was refused. And he knew that the sands were running away faster and faster, and that every moment of this limited time might be the moment decisive of all eternity.

Ian drew his hand away.

"Take a chair, Jimmy, and sit where I can see you," he said. "No, don't be afraid about me. I'm fairly easy. I'm quite easy. One generally is, about the end. Just a bit short in the wind. I got your letter, Jimmy.

"Yes, Ianny, dear."

"It's—it's made all the difference, you know."

James cleared his throat; hesitated, broke into speech; fell silent. He had to take a decision before which he quailed. He had tidings fraught with the extremes of consolation and of despair. He had to tell her husband of Morna's unstained honor. And to tell him of this was to tell him upon what insane freak of passion they both had wrecked their lives. It was also to cast reproach at him, and, rather than that, Morna had thought she would rather remain to the last besmirched in his eyes.

Yet, at the moment of their parting in the storm, she had prayed him to speak before the end. How near was Ian to that end? Would he last till Morna herself could give him, with the supreme comfort of her presence, the assurance that in life she had been his only, and in death would be his still?

If he lived so long, would his failing faculties be able to grasp the facts in their great significance? And if he, James, seized upon this favorable hour when Ian had pronounced himself at ease, when, with the night's solitude

all about them, they communed in brotherly affection, might not the shock of the revelation be fatal, and at the end of the long, terrible journey, Morna find only death under her kiss?

"I heard they had kept back my letter," James had begun, and then had floundered into his tormented silence. Ian waited patiently awhile. At last he said:

"Jimmy, I'm beyond it all now, you needn't be afraid. It's not that I don't care, but—it's a little hard to explain —it seems as if things were all being smoothed out. I can't struggle, I can't fight. I just lie, and somehow I feel, yes, I feel her love, like a sea spreading out about me. No, I'm not wandering. It's . . . it's peace."

James gripped his hands together.

"Yes, Ianny—" he said. "She loves you. There is no doubt about that. And her love reaches out to you. And don't forget love is from God. If you go to God, you must find love. And you are going to God, Ianny . . . dear Ianny."

There came a long pause in the room, once more. And then the Master said, in that broken speech which was all the laboring breath allowed him:

"Ah, Jimmy dear, I lost my way!"

James came over to his brother's bed again. He was hardly conscious of his action, moved as he was by so tender and overwhelming a desire.

"It is not too late to get back."

The Master's face, which had been beautiful with a mysterious serenity, became stirred with trouble. He made an eager movement which left him breathless for a moment. Then speaking quickly:

"James—good James! You can't know. Good all your life, you don't know. God—the only God I know, is a God of vengeance. I have been punished."

Alarmed at the growing excitement, James bent closer.

"Ianny, dear, quietly . . . ."

"Not so close, old man, I'm all right. . . . No, not that confounded nurse! Sit down there. I'll wait a bit. Sit there."

With a gesture of the old impatience, Ian flung out his hand. The other obeyed. After a while, the sick man spoke again, with calmness this time; very low, sparing his strength.

"You remember that day on the moor, you asked me what had I done?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I said I had done nothing. I was too fit to kill you. But you looked, Jimmy, you looked—and I remembered something."

James caught his breath. The words: "Ian, I know," trembled on his lips. But he locked them in dumbness: such tremendous issues were at stake. Better let the heart unburden itself.

"When you looked like that, something woke up in me. I'd forgotten it—you'll not believe that easily—but I had. It meant so little—it was so long ago. Such years and years ago!" The low voice trailed off in a weak whisper. Once more silence fell between them. Outside, the wind was dropping before the approach of morning. Only the ivy leaves that clasped the tower were brushing and tapping against each other with small, busy sounds. And the burn talked over the boulders, far away.

"It was in South Africa. That time, all those years ago. A bit of madness, like . . . like a bottle of champagne too much. No consequence to anybody! A set of idle fellows, a demoralized set of rascals—a bet I think it was. Somebody defied me. And she, the woman, as bad as they make them, but clever enough just to . . . Oh, damn it all!"

"Ian, I think I understand."

"When you asked me, I was furious. And when the memory came I was angrier still. So many years ago, that single passing folly, forgotten, forgotten! Then, lying here, Jimmy, I began to think God was serving me out. It's in the blood—the Scotch blood. Our God is a God of vengeance! I broke His law—yes, I did that."

"Oh, no, no!" cried James. "A God of love, Ianny!"

"I sinned," went on Ian. "And she sinned. . . . And her sin was God's chastisement for mine."

"Oh, Ianny," cried the priest in an agony, "sin is not God's way—how could sin be God's way? And Morna—Morna never sinned at all, as you think."

His heart almost stopped beating, as the truth leaped out. What had he done? Would Ian bear the shock?

The Master lay for a little while wrapt in an extraordinary stillness. Then:

"She found out," he said. It was not a question—it was a statement. There was no surprise in his tone. No emotion. "Jimmy," he went on, "I worked it all out for myself, afterwards. Yes, even before your letter came—she found out," he repeated, "and she cast me off."

"It came—the knowledge of it came upon her. A letter, from that woman, blackmailing, while you were ill."

Ian interrupted with a groan:

"Don't bring me through it all! It doesn't matter how —since she knew!"

"Ianny, she did you a cruel wrong! But the blow—her trust in you—" he was hesitating, picking his words.

"It was my sin finding me out. Did I not say it? He is a God of vengeance."

At this once more the truth escaped James over the barriers of prudence.

"Ian, her sin was greater than yours! That sin of anger and revenge was greater than your first sin of frailty. But, Oh, brother, all is changed with her now. She bade me keep silence rather than cast reproach at you. Did you not say you felt her love reaching out to you? Oh, it is true, it is true! Ianny, if God lets that come to you—is He a God of vengeance? If out of the sins of both—your terrible sins of wrath and unforgiveness, your love for each other has emerged stronger than ever, tenderer, purer, is it not through Him? Is He not a God of mercy?"

The Master closed his eyes and lay once again in absorbed quietude. Body and spirit seemed alike lost in the inner stillness. Only the flickering breath spoke of continued life.

James sat motionless, waiting for those heavy shadowed lids to be lifted again. But the sick man lay in his great lassitude; and, after a while, the watcher thought sleep had fallen upon him. He drew from his breast his little worn "Imitation of Christ" and opened it at hazard.

There are times when the crushed soul finds in those

austere pages, an unfailing sweetness of comfort. He read and pondered, pausing to pray—wrestling with doubt and anguish, crying out with desperate assault, for his brother's peace. Carefully he turned the leaf.

"What have you got there, Father James?" The Master spoke with his former gentle accent of irony:

"Thomas à Kempis."

"Read out—read just where you are, old man. The night is so long," said Ian, as if to himself. "And I'm so tired of thinking."

James the mystic believed ever afterwards, that his hand was guided, as glancing down he began to read the verse against which his thumb happened to be laid.

> A great thing is love, a great good every way; which alone lighteneth all that is burthensome, and beareth equally all that is unequal . . .

Softly he read, dropping each word distinctly; and paused at the end of the verse. There was no sound or movement from the bed, and he went on. Having reached the end of the page, he believed once again that sleep must have come; and he let his voice die away into silence.

But Ian stirred and bade him continue.

> Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not.
>
> When weary it is not tired; when straightened it is not constrained; when frightened it is not disturbed; but, like a vivid flame and a burning torch, it mounteth upward, and securely passeth through all.

Whosoever loveth knoweth the cry of this voice.

"Whosoever loveth knoweth the cry of this voice . . . " the Master repeated the words.

Then he said: "He knew . . . the man who wrote that knew. He was a lover." Then he added, as if to himself, "We failed, Jimmy, you remember, that night, out there, near the old chapel, you said it: we are forlorn adventurers."

"Oh, Ianny, no! No longer that." Then, stammering: "Morna—she's striving, striving, too. Look upwards, Ianny. Look beyond."

Ian folded his lips and closed his eyes.

The nurse came in: with professional deliberation felt the patient's pulse. Then she glanced at the priest.

"It's really done him good to see you," she said encouragingly. "He must have his medicine, though. And after that," she turned briskly to the Master, and speaking with a look and tone as if he had been a child: "I'd like you to sleep again, you know."

Ian's face quivered with delicate, contemptuous amusement.

"My good creature, I've got a long time before me to sleep in. By your leave, I'll keep awake now."

She looked disconcerted. She was not accustomed to such outspokenness on the part of the dying. She was even a little shocked and annoyed. It struck her as bad taste. It was a glance of reproach she cast now at the priest. Catholics had queer ways. She tossed her head, twitched at the coverlet and went out of the room again.



"You know where to find me, Mr. MacIvor," she remarked coldly as she passed him.

Ian gave a tired laugh. "I'll rest a bit, though," he said. "Stay there, Jimmy, it's good to have you."

An indescribable change began to grow in the darkness outside. It was not light, or even the coming of light; but a movement, a sense of stirring, of withdrawal. Night was gathering her vast black garments together, slowly, mysteriously preparing to give place to the cold advance of dawn.

At one moment James' tired eyes saw nothing but the densest gloom, even a deepening of gloom between those flung-back casements. And the next, it was no longer black, but gray; a livid ominous hue compared to which the darkness had seemed warm and compassionate.

James remembered how often it is that with the dawn comes Death. It is the hour when the ebbing vitality fails abruptly, and the struggling spirit sinks. He turned a terrified glance upon his brother.

The Master's eyes were wide open, gazing at him.

"Jimmy, I'll hold on." It was a mere whisper. "I'll hold on . . . till she comes!"

At these words, James' pulses beat tumultuously. Ian knew Morna was coming! How had he come to this knowledge suddenly and mysteriously? Like broken strains of music the phrases he had just read aloud rang back into his ears:

"Nothing is sweeter than love; nothing stronger, nothing higher. . . . It can achieve anything . . . love watcheth, and, sleeping, slumbereth not."

"Morna will be here tomorrow night," said he, speaking as naturally as he could, that the listener might not be startled by the realization of his own visionary power.

"The waters are all about her, and there is a mist on the sea." So saying the Master turned his head on his pillow, and his brother, rising, took the lamp back into its place behind the screen, and then went softly over to the window and stood looking out. He hoped the Master would sleep.

From the balcony of the Casa Benedetto, scarcely a week ago, he had looked down upon a transformation scene of surpassing beauty; the earth mists turned into fire of gold and rose by the magic of the sunset. It was a cold world he looked down upon, this break of day, from the high turret of his Scottish stronghouse. The wind had fallen and there was wide stillness, in which the early vapors were gathering and rising, with capricious and mysterious effect. The tree-tops emerged as from a dim sea: things more of dream than reality. The lake was lost altogether to sight; but over it the white wreaths hung so thick that they took palpable shape. The light in the east was still only a blanching of the universal gray. The vision spread, gray above and below, save for the blotted outlines of the peering woods and the jutting angles of wall and gateway—a picture drawn with ghostly negation of color. That first circle of Dante's Inferno may have risen thus before the poet's mind; a gray world, a ghost world, without substance, without hope of life.

James shuddered. The chill pierced him to the marrow. He was worn with travel and watching. But the spirit



burned too excitedly for him to feel the physical need of rest otherwise than by its reaction on his courage. A movement from the bed brought him quickly back into the room.

Ian was tossing his arms about and muttering to himself. James, bending over him, could not tell whether he were wandering or in an uneasy sleep. The eyes were half-closed. In the warring lights of shaded lamp within and early dawn outside, his brother's face seemed strange, drawn; almost as the face of another man. He took the restless hand. Ian's soul must be hovering in some dim region between time and eternity, where it saw and heard things outside the realm of ordinary human consciousness; or else hallucination was haunting the weary brain. Broken words escaped him.

"Four walls . . . open to the sky. Under the sky ! The deep and narrow bed . . . where the altar stood . . . lined with bog-myrtle . . . and fir boughs. The scent of it! Open to the sky . . . and the wind of the moor! Here come the pipes, over the hill. Slowly . . . slowly, shifting the burden. The pipes. The lament of Ivor. . . . How they wail! . . . "

Again a shudder seized James. Highlander as he was, his own spirit leaped to the mysterious significance of words, which to another would have been but the disconnected rambling of a sick mind. The Master of Stronaven was speaking of his own funeral.

"Ian—Ian!" he cried impulsively.

His brother started slightly and came back to realities.

"I don't know where I was—" he said vaguely. "Jimmy, is that you? Where did you come from? Good fellow,

it's kind of you!—I'm glad to see you. Don't leave me."

"Shall I call the nurse?"

"Nurse? No nurse! I've had enough of them. They've killed me with nursing. Duncan—poor lad—a fool that I was to let them turn him away! I wanted my chance, you see! He's out there, isn't he? Aye—I know he's there—good lad—Jimmy . . . did I dream it? Did you tell me? Someone told me Morna is coming."

"Yes—she will be here today, this evening. It was—" James hesitated, "it was Oenone summoned her."

A transient look of wonder came over Ian's countenance.

"Oenone did that?" he said. "Yes, I remember she was kind about the letter." Then he pressed his brother's hand and smiled. It was a smile of extraordinary sweetness. "That was a good letter of yours— That was good what you said—nothing to part us in eternity—God is good, Jimmy," he murmured. "I feel strangely certain I'll last—" He smiled again.

James' heart trembled within him; he must not allow himself to doubt either. Even the nurse had thought Ian singularly strengthened.

"God is good," he repeated.

The morning wore on. The hours, long they seemed in the slow gathering of the light, the gradual awakening of the world outside, the deep silences that fell in great spells between the two brothers; long, too, they weighed on the fatigued frame of the traveler; but with what appalling rapidity they fled as measured by his love and sorrow. How dearly he grudged the passing of every minute!

Afterwards, looking back on that last morning of Ian's



life, he thought it had sped like the rush of a falling star. So much, so much there would have been to say between them—so little time to say it in; so little strength even for that little time. Yet, recalling it all afterwards, with agonies of doubt, regret and self-searching, James came in the end to realize that strength had been granted sufficient for the need; that no irredeemable silence had sealed the fount of Hope.

Once Ian spoke of that great unknown—the void that gaped before him:

"It's strange, Jimmy—and awful! And you think you call it eternity, a new life. The soul goes out into it, charged with all the sins of the body—the poor cast-off body."

"Not if you're sorry, Ianny."

"Sorry?" The Master's lip was lifted with his slight sarcastic smile. "Sorry, when I've been bludgeoned to death!"

"Oh, Ianny, God never made that bludgeon."

"No—" said the other after a pause, "you are right. It's justice."

And it was then that James knelt beside the bed and spoke the few words of faith, encouragement and comfort that he might give. He took from about his neck the little brass crucifix that he wore against his breast and put it into the Master's hand.

"Ianny, dear, you gave me—do you remember?—such a wonderful cross, ivory and silver and all jeweled. I give you this, Ianny. Hold on to it. Hold it tight— He bore our sins— He bears yours— Oh, Ianny, He is the Man of Sorrows. He died. By Him we are healed."

Simple words, such as a child might understand, but they came out of the fire of longing that consumed the priest for the soul that he alone could help: they were kindled with the mystic flame of his own faith: they were charged with the tremendous significance of the hours that divide life from death.

At such hours nothing is trivial. A touch of hands is a solemn act. The least word of love has in it the tragedy of mortal farewells.

And presently Morna's name came again between them; giving sweetness to James' prayer and heart to Ian's courage.

These two poor lovers who had sinned and wronged each other, and suffered, were yet to find in each other's love the only holy thing in life. And it was out of this very catastrophe, out of the passion and the pain, out of parting and death that their love was to deepen and strengthen itself, to become purified and enduring in the light of eternity.

Holding his brother's hand the Master fell at last into another of his half-conscious slumbers. And when he woke again, the priest stiffly rose to draw the curtain against the streaming daylight, and to make up the fire.

After another visit from the nurse, and the strengthening food she gave him, Ian was clearer in mind, calmer in speech, more himself than he had been yet. With something of the imperiousness that had always been so characteristic of him, he made James take down certain definite instructions concerning his wishes after his death.

"I won't be stuffed away in the family vault. Mind

that! I'll be out somewhere—on the moor. They can put me in the ruined chapel—open to the sky . . . I'll like that. The great gray sky . . . and the wind of the moor blowing free over me. Tell Morna she can lie there, too, when her time comes."

James, struck with the singular chill that every mortal feels when unknown and inexplicable forces reach out to him from the spirit world, sat unable to speak.

"You've nothing against it?" cried the Master sharply. "It's consecrated ground, isn't it? A chapel, of the old faith . . . of your faith. You'll see that I'm laid there. Promise."

"I promise, Ian."

"A double tomb, Jimmy. Leave room for her. And only my own people. Let there be no strangers. No pomp. Let the lads carry me—and Duncan pipe over me . . . that's all. A handful of bog-myrtle—no wreaths. And, Oh, keep off the Duvenant parade! Morna and you . . . you two . . . and my Highland lads!"

He made not the slightest allusion to the wife taken in anger, and the child conceived in vengeance.

James felt how utterly that mad phase of life had passed from his brother's soul. It was not possible, even if it could have been done without risk of dangerously disturbing him, to bring it back upon him. No matter how unnatural and cruel the omission might seem, the priest resolved that it was wiser to respect this withdrawal of the doomed man from his own intolerable deed and its consequences.

Toward eight o'clock the Master demanded to have the room darkened; said that he was comfortable and

would sleep; dismissed his brother; and, overbearing the nurse, masterfully declared that he would have none but Duncan to watch him.

CHAPTER III

LUNCH was nearly over. The servants had left the room, and James was already anticipating the moment of escape, when Mrs. Duvenant began to tremble. The eyes she now fixed on the priest were charged with a vindictiveness that amazed his gentle soul.

"Of course, Mr. MacIvor," she said, attacking him suddenly, "if anything happens—" it is elegant in polite society to temper the crudity of death with some such paraphrase, and Mrs. Duvenant, even in anger, was nothing if not elegant—"if anything happens, prematurely, to the Master, we—my daughter and I—must hold you entirely responsible!"

Oenone looked up languidly and cast a meaning glance at her brother-in-law; catching his eye, she gave him the merest suspicion of a wink. Then she looked down again at her plate and began once again her idle pastime of arranging the grape-pits on it in little rows, with the point of the enameled fruit-knife.

The three sat in the echoing dining-hall, the ancestral dignity of which was too dear to the Duvenant mind for the ruling spirit at Stronaven to permit the use of any apartment better proportioned to their numbers.

James had found the ordeal of the repast very trying, and the pompous attendance of four servants had jarred



upon his nerves to an unreasonable degree. Yet, now that they were abandoned to their dessert and coffee, he found the situation more intolerable still.

Mrs. Duvenant's sally had taken him by surprise. Oenone's light-minded reception of it evoked in him a stirring of profound resentment—it passed the bounds of decency. He could not, he would not, acknowledge that trivial signal. To Mrs. Duvenant he replied with mildness:

"Ian is not the worse for seeing me, Mrs. Duvenant, I am grateful to say. But, even if it had tired him, there were things upon which it was necessary that we should confer together."

Mrs. Duvenant's face crimsoned.

"My daughter and I are accustomed to be put on one side, in this house, Mr. MacIvor." After feminine fashion she marked the degree of her displeasure by the petty slight: the priest was to be mulcted of his usual title. "Ever since the Master's illness, things have been done, arrangements have been made—hold your tongue, Nonny, someone must speak for you, child!"

James looked and felt profoundly uncomfortable. How much did Mrs. Duvenant know of his mission to Italy; of his letter; of Ian's disastrous attempt to get possession of it; of Oenone's extraordinary intervention.

Huskily he said, at last:

"My brother is dying. I have thought chiefly of what could be of comfort to him."

Oenone once again lifted her delicate head, and opened her lips to speak. But, shrilly, the mother forestalled her:

"Pray, consider your language before my daughter. She's not in a condition to bear these cruel statements—and, pray, let me finish, Mr. MacIvor—Nonny, it is for me to speak. This gentleman, your husband's brother, chose from the first moment of your—your most unfortunate marriage, my poor dear child—to treat you with the utmost discourtesy. To ignore you, in fact. To insult you! He comes now, now . . . walks into this place as if he were master, upsets all our careful arrangements; turns the nurse out of the room in defiance of doctor's orders; puts an ignorant gilly in her place—an impertinent fellow who has already given us a great deal of trouble."

"I beg your pardon—are you speaking of Duncan MacVurish?"

"I believe Duncan is his name."

"He is Ian's foster-brother—almost one of ourselves. My brother asked for him. I don't think you quite understand our ways."

"I certainly don't understand." The mirth of extreme exasperation convulsed Mrs. Duvenant's frame. "Your ways up here are very strange ways, Mr. MacIvor. But you need not think you can distract my mind from the very grave business I have to speak to you about, the very great responsibility you have taken. It is of the utmost importance, the utmost—" Her voice broke upon the emotion that here seized her. Again she shook from head to foot. "I think I am the only person in this house who realizes what it means to my child that the Master's life should be prolonged."

James shot a glance of astonishment at the speaker.

"But, Mrs. Duvenant—" he began.



Oenone interrupted him. She pushed her plate away, set her coffee cup on the top of it, with a little clatter; placed a gold cigarette case and matchbox in front of her, and proceeded to light herself a cigarette. Both combatants were struck to silence by her imperturbable attitude in the midst of their own emotion. She puffed once and then said:

"Mummie, do hold your tongue. You're making such a fuss!" She turned to James: "Please don't mind her. Mummie, you see, is just a bag of nerves. Haven't we done? Don't you want to go back to Ian?"

"Nonny!" cried the mother.

There was such a pitch of indignation in her voice, that Oenone shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed:

"Oh, well, have it your own way!"

She then pettishly pushed her chair on one side as if to show that she considered herself out of the conversation.

"I will not go back to Ian," said James quietly, "till I am sent for." His forehead was still red with that flush which the singularity of Mrs. Duvenant's last pronouncement had called up. He now addressed that lady in the same steady voice: "I think we are all agreed—we must be all agreed—that no desire could be closer to our hearts than to preserve as long as possible that—that precious life. But, forgive me, I cannot help feeling—you mean something different. Forgive me if I am wrong, but you speak as if——"

Mrs. Duvenant tossed her head.

"Oh, Mr. MacIvor—you think yourself very scathing!"

Oenone got up noisily, and walked over to the great hearth, to stand languidly under the stone-carven hood.

Her mother went on speaking, in those accents of condensed passion in which she had conducted the whole interview:

"I make no pretense at such—hypocrisy. We live in the world, Mr. MacIvor, my daughter and I. And we must be of the world. I consider it my duty to protect my daughter's interests from the worldly point of view. It is only right, it is only natural, that I should desire her to have some compensation in this disastrous alliance."

James continued looking fixedly at the speaker, but kept silence. What other answer but silence could he make to the vulgar common-sense of these words?

"You need not look at me like that, sir."

"I beg your pardon," he dropped his glance. "I do not think I quite follow you."

"Well, Mr. MacIvor, I have reliable information that your father, Lord Stronaven, is in a very, very precarious state."

"Indeed!" The exclamation was sharp: and he followed it in tones of involuntary sarcasm. "And what may that—reliable authority be?"

"Your own family lawyer, Mr. MacIvor," triumphantly she replied. Her eyes gleamed as she went on: "I had occasion to write to him. I—in fact, I thought it my duty to ascertain my daughter's exact position in certain contingencies. Among other questions, I asked him how long Lord Stronaven was expected to live on—I trust there need be no sentiment on this score. And in his letter back he wrote very plainly: Lord Stronaven may die at any moment."

"I see," said James.



Oenone struck a match, with a fierce scratching sound against the stone of the chimney and lit another cigarette.

The priest's gaze abstractedly fixed itself upon the girlish figure, while the anger—as fierce as it was unwonted—called up by Mrs. Duvenant's frank statement of her maneuvers, slowly died within him. The slight creature, in the obtrusive modernity of her garb, struck him, of a sudden, as pathetically incongruous to her surroundings. How had she strayed into this story of passion, with her ephemeral, inconsequent prettiness? A butterfly among clashing swords! An exotic flower on the Highland moor; the stern soil could not prosper it, the wild winds must blight it.

In the frowning shadow of the great stone chimney-hood she stood; and, over her delicate frivolous head, spread the rugged wings of the Stronaven eagle, its menacing beak parted in menace, its talons gripping. *Jamais n'oublie!* the words of the motto ran, deep in the stone. Deeper still was it graven in the heart of the race. Love or hate, friend or foe, never could it forget.

The silence that had fallen, seemed gradually to oppress Mrs. Duvenant. She had glanced several times from her daughter's studiously indifferent face to the stern, set countenance of the priest. She was becoming uncomfortable. Her acrid wrath had exhausted itself. She used her fan vigorously, closed her eyes and drew a long breath, as one oppressed. At last she said plaintively:

"Can I be blamed for putting the interests of my only child first in all the trouble that has come upon her. What has she had out of it all, Father MacIvor, but trouble? How has she been treated in this house? Even the

Duchess of Monmouth behaved most unexpectedly, most discourteously. We had asked several neighbors to meet her at dinner, and she hurried away—went off at a moment's notice, without even a pretense at an excuse, the day of our dreadful discovery about Ian, when if ever my poor little girl wanted help and encouragement and cheering—and I myself, I who thought her such a friend, I felt it deeply, very deeply indeed!"

Tears rose to Mrs. Duvenant's eyes and trickled down her cheeks. She put her fan to her trembling lips.

"Well, I never wanted a cat like that Duchess of yours, to cheer me, anyhow." Oenone flung the dry comment over her shoulder.

"I'm not surprised at your feeling hurt, dearie—she's pretty well hurt all round, Mr. MacIvor. Are you aware that not once has her husband asked to see her, sent her a single message or shown that he's even thought of her, since his illness?"

Oenone took the cigarette from her lips, looked at it, dropped it into the fire and then slowly crossed the room back to the table. She walked with the curious flexible gait which distinguishes the younger generation. Her hands were thrust into the pockets of her sports-coat, and she was jingling matchbox and cigarette case together as she came.

"Well, Mummie," she said humorously, "you've had a real happy time, haven't you?" Then she turned to James and addressed him in the same lightly jeering manner: "Now you've got the family point of view. Poor Mummie, she thinks a deal of me, you see. And there is something, after all, in what she says isn't there? Only



what's the use of worrying, I say—it comes to this, Mummie: there's been a big blunder, made by the lot of us, and we've got to make the best of it. Ian hasn't sent for me, because he doesn't care one rap for me. That's true. But then I don't know that I particularly want to be with him—just now, at least. I'm not fond of seeing people when they're sick. It's not as if I could do any good. I don't know how it would have been, if he had cared—I mean about me."

She paused. Mrs. Duvenant was fanning herself again.

"Nonny, Nonny, you break my heart!"

"Oh, no, I don't—don't talk nonsense, Mummie! You might break your heart if I did care." She laughed faintly. "It's somebody else that's got to be with Ian. And I've been thinking that some time. Well, I've done it now."

James started, and held his breath: Mrs. Duvenant did not know.

Oenone sat down, scraped her chair round to face her mother; then fixing her, she said with a smile:

"I've telegraphed for his first wife."

Mrs. Duvenant dropped her fan and caught at her throat, with starting eyes.

"She'll be here tonight," said Oenone. "Now don't you make a fuss, Mother, for it isn't a scrap of use."

But she might as well have tried to stem the waters of the burn now rushing in spate, from the heights into the lake, with her little hands as to arrest the torrent of Mrs. Duvenant's outraged feelings. The poor lady had indeed received a severe shock. She swayed in her chair, with every indication of approaching syncope, stretching

out groping hands in an alarming manner. But when James hurried round to assist her, she recovered sufficiently to gather herself together, with a hissing exclamation: "Do not touch me!" The word "serpent" was not pronounced, but certainly hovered in the air. Then she choked, rolled her eye with agonized expression on her daughter, and cried in heart-rending tones: "My poor Nonny—my poor unhappy little girl!" After which she fixed the priest again, and fulminated: "These are your machinations!"

Oenone shrugged her shoulders once more with an air of helplessness; and turned her back deliberately upon the gathering storm. Her manner expressed the philosophical intention of allowing it to rage itself out.

"It is you, Mr. MacIvor," went on Mrs. Duvenant, "who have brought this scandal upon us! This shame—this shame upon my daughter. No doubt you think yourself very clever, Father MacIvor." This time the denied title was employed with telling offensiveness. "This is a triumph for the Church of Rome, you think! This—this indecency! You are no doubt acting under authority. Oh, I quite see, I quite understand! This was why you shut yourself up with my unhappy son-in-law. Poor helpless, dying man! You've been converting him, I daresay! Now I see it all—" she repeated. "Mrs. Inglis came to spy! You thrust yourself here with plans ready made. A plot—the vilest plot! But you have reckoned without me, sir!"

She rose, so possessed by wrath and injured feeling that every nerve seemed visibly to quiver like fine-drawn wires. "You've reckoned without me, without a mother! That



woman"—she bent forward and flung out a threatening forefinger; her voice sank again to a hissing whisper—"that woman does not cross the threshold of my daughter's house as long as I am alive to prevent it."

She had to pause for breath, and Oenone turned upon her with a movement as of a small angry animal:

"You can't think what nonsense you're talking! Oh, dear, how I hate a fuss. For goodness' sake drink a glass of port, or something, Mummie, and stop going on. Poor James hasn't done anything at all. I asked Morna long before he came. I telegraphed to Morna—I do call her Morna. I will call her Morna. I'll call her what I like. It's my business, and nobody else's. It's mine—and Ian's." She paused and again sought James' eye. She did not wink, this time, but there was nevertheless a glint of unmistakable mischief in hers. As plain as glance could speak, she was saying to him: "Don't mind my tantrums—it's the only way." Then she went on, reproachfully: "And I am sure if you love me so much, Mummie, you'd think a little bit of me. Especially the way I am."

"Oh, Nonny! Oh, my dearie!" Mrs. Duvenant melted into tears.

"I will have Morna here, if I want to." Oenone stamped her foot. "Don't go, James; Mother's sorry. Aren't you, Mummie? Now you'll have a headache. You know you will. You'll have to go to bed; and—" Her bright eyes here once more included James in the complicity of her innocently unfilial craft. "And I'm not sure that bed wouldn't be the best place for you, just at first, till we settle down a little. You'd rather be there, wouldn't you, when Morna comes tonight?"

"Settle down a little," had murmured Mrs. Duvenant aghast, looking up from her pocket-handkerchief. And, as the last phrase finally disposed of her authority, she got up from her seat and crying out, in great agitation: "My own child turns against me!" was making for the door, when it was flung open in front of her, and the butler entered, bearing a telegram on a salver.

Mrs. Duvenant made a blind gesture to take it, but the man passed her deliberately, and halting before his young mistress, observed, in low confidential tones:

"This is addressed to the Master, Madam. I did not like to send it upstairs without directions."

Oenone eyed the yellow envelope askance; then said: "Oh, dear—Oh, James, you read it—take it round to Father MacIvor, Rufford."

"Stop!" said Mrs. Duvenant in majestic tones. She had recovered self-control, with the rapidity of people subject to such nervous attacks, under the stimulus of a new excitement. "I cannot see this—this extraordinary abdication take place before my eyes." She swooped down upon the hesitating servant, and, with regal air seized the telegram. "It is you and you only, Oenone, who must take your husband's place." So saying, as if automatically, she broke open the envelope and drew forth the sheet.

"Oh, Mummie, you are—" said Oenone, with an angry laugh. She made a grimace at James, who stood, the most uncomfortable and tormented of beings, longing for release. "Perhaps it's from Morna," she mouthed voicelessly.

The same suspicion was evidently at the back of Mrs.



Duvenant's high handed action; she was frowning heavily as she walked to the window to peruse the message apart.

As she read, however, her countenance changed. The frown disappeared, to be replaced by an air of stupefaction, succeeded by a crimsoning, quivering agitation. She dropped the hand that held the flimsy paper; it was indeed trembling so violently that she could hardly hold it aloft. Then she almost ran across the room toward her daughter, and clasped her to her breast:

"My own Nonny! My blessed dearie!" And from the middle of that embrace, she shot a look of hatred undiminished at James, and hurled at him the extraordinary remark: "You can do your worst, now, Mr. MacIvor. God himself has protected us!"

Oenone disengaged herself with more real irritation than she had yet shown.

"Mummie, don't! You know I can't bear it. What is it you are making a fuss about?"

She twitched the telegram impatiently out of her mother's hand as she spoke:

"Your father passed away this morning . . . " she read. "My goodness, Papa?"

"Nonnie, how horrible! . . . What are you saying?"

"Oh, no, of course," she corrected herself, coolly. But her laugh was tremulous. "You did give me a turn, Mummie! Of course it's not to us. It's Ian's father. It's your father, James——"

"And you're Lady Stronaven, dearie!" cried the mother, "in spite of—in spite of everything!"

James had turned very pale. Though it was not a matter for sentiment, as Mrs. Duvenant herself had said, the

death of a father, even in such a case as that of the old mad Lord Stronaven, cannot leave a son unmoved. But the knowledge that he who might justly have been expected to bear the family honors for many years to come, was doomed to follow so soon, so terribly soon, added a blackness of tragedy to what might otherwise have been only a respectful grief, tempered by relief.

Mrs. Duvenant's irrepressible satisfaction stung James to a display of indignation such as he had rarely, if ever, shown.

"It will matter little how soon Ian dies now," he said. And his words fell the more scornfully that they were spoken with such extreme quietness. Then he added, with a lift of the lip which gave him a sudden resemblance to his brother: "It is the custom to wait till after the funeral before assuming the title."

He went out of the room then with a steady step.

"That," said Mrs. Duvenant emphatically, as the door closed, "that's a dangerous man."

Oenone had an unusual flush on her cheeks.

"He might have said he didn't mean me," she said in a hurt voice. "I think I have been pretty good, to the clan Ivor—or whatever they call themselves, taking it all round. My gracious, didn't know he had it in him! Of course you were dreadful, Mummie; but I do hate to be made to look mean. Oh well," she went on, her usual philosophy re-asserting itself, as the heat on her pretty cheeks cooled down. "I've done nothing to be ashamed of, anyhow. And it does make a difference. Yes, I shall like to be Lady Stronaven. It just—well, Mummie, it just prevents one feeling altogether a kind of fool. I don't



think anyone would have the heart to grudge me that. Not any MacIvor, at any rate. And if the ba-by isn't a boy——"

"Don't say that, dearie. I won't have you say that!" Mrs. Duvenant, taking her daughter unawares, kissed her passionately again. "Nonny, my dearie," she exclaimed, and a rush of tears almost strangled her utterance, "when I think it's all my fault—yes, my dearie, it is, and you such a child! I thought I was doing the best for you! I was taken in, cheated—what between the Duchess, and she so false and sweet, and the way that woman, Lady Martindale, drove me on. . . . Wicked it was!" She paused, sobbing. "I'm fit to kill myself when I think of it all. I—I that would die for you, dearie . . . "

"Oh, well, Mummie—" Oenone shrank from these violent emotions. But, somewhere, in an unacknowledged forlornness of heart, she was glad of her mother's championship. "What's the use?" She gave the elder lady's wet cheek a butterfly kiss. "Go to bed. You're fit for nothing else. You look all to pieces. There, poor Mummie, there! You needn't take on. . . . I'm not sure, after all, that I won't have just as good a time, perhaps better, when all this is over. And if it hadn't turned out just this way—it's rather a fine thing to be Lady Stronaven. And there's another thing! There won't be two Mrs. MacIvors now—" Then she added, with a laugh: "I wonder what she'll be like! It is rather queer my having her here, I suppose."

Mrs. Duvenant moaned. She put her hand to her head and tottered toward the door. Not for the first time, she reflected that Oenone was oddly deficient in certain natural

instincts. "She doesn't seem to me to feel like a woman at all," thought the mother. Had it not been for that attained coronet and what it represented, this hour would have been the bitterest of the poor lady's life.

It had been among the bitterest in James MacIvor's experience. The pain that pierced him at his brother's bedside was more bearable. It was a great sorrow; but God was in it somewhere. Through all the anguish of dissolution, of renunciation, he knew that Ian was finding God in it. There was a peace in that room, and a high exquisite atmosphere, as of the spirit waxing though the substance failed. The mere earthly stood there in its proper relation to eternity. But to have to sit and see the most sacred reserves violated, the great mystery trivially handled; to hear Ian's mortal illness made a subject for wrangling and sordid speculation—there had been no redeeming element in the degradation. He had lost his temper, and sinned in anger. Scorn was still on his lips, and there was still resentment in his heart.

He went up the winding stone stairs, out of peace with himself. He had had but few hours of sleep that morning, snatched after his vigil. And he was oppressed with the knowledge of unavoidable calamity, the apprehension of unendurable possibilities.

The shadow of death was now doubly upon Stronaven. He thought of his father's white head in the shrouded room, still in that forlorn isolation. His place should have been there now, kneeling in prayer—and yet he could scarcely abstract a thought from the nearer, dearer grief.

He had almost to remind himself that, all those miles away, in Edinburgh, his sire lay dead.

All seemed still in Ian's chamber. After a moment's hesitation James tapped softly at the door opposite.

It was the day nurse that appeared; a small dark woman, who looked instantly vindictive at sight of him, and like Mrs. Duvenant, began to tremble.

He saw that he had irrevocably offended sick-room etiquette and wondered wearily why human beings should show so little kindness to each other.

"How is your patient?"

"He's still asleep, I believe," she answered, biting off her words. "At least, as far as I know." She gave an acid titter: really she was like Mrs. Duvenant! Then she added spitefully: "It is a comatose condition. He may, very probably, sink into unconsciousness."

James went to his own room, with this dagger thrust in his heart. He tried to read, he tried to pray, he could not settle to anything; he could not rest.

Two telegrams were brought to him in the course of the afternoon—both redirected from St. Michael's; one from the lawyer contained the same announcement as that sent to Ian. But here the writer had added:

> Owing to the Master's regrettable illness, think you had better come at once and give all necessary instructions.

The other telegram was from Lady Martindale.

> Poor Papa dead at last. Happy release. Of course you'll go to Edinburgh today. Wire me London about funeral. Fond, fond love. MILLY.

It took some reflection before he could word his reply to Edinburgh to his own satisfaction. It was out of the question that he should leave Stronaven at this juncture. The dying had a stronger claim upon him than the dead. He finally decided to summon a representative of the firm to Stronaven, the next day.

"Unable to leave the Master. Trust to you for all immediate arrangements," he wrote.

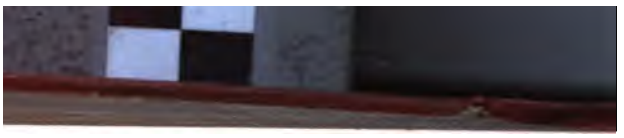
As for Milly he decided not to answer her today. Her appearance at Stronaven now would be nothing short of disaster.

He went back into the passage, and, thinking he heard a stir in the sick-room, ventured, with infinite precaution to open the door.

A moment he stood staring; the picture stamped itself upon his brain. It was one that haunted him ever after. Duncan was standing motionless by the bed with the Master gathered in his arms. And Ian was asleep, his beautiful pallid head resting upon the shoulder of his foster-brother. The rough brown hands of the gillie were clasping the deadly white ones. The man turned and looked warningly. His pale blue eyes were full of a strange fire.

James closed the door and sought his room again. Duncan will keep him alive for Morna—he thought. Duncan is strong—he will give Ian his strength.

His own eyes were wet with tears.



CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR GRIGOR, the old Scotchman who had piloted the two brothers through all their childish ailments, was very anxious to avoid an interview with James. The latter, however—having been asleep at the time of the morning visit—was equally determined to secure it that evening.

The old man answered his question with roughness. Your Northerner dislikes emotion on principle, and hates nothing more than showing it.

"Ye ken it's the end."

Yes, James knew that. But how long?

The doctor threw out his gnarled hands.

"And that is what nobody can tell ye, not even your grand pheesicians from Edinbro'. But what I will tell you, my lad, is that gin ye'd have been satisfied to leave him in old Grigor's care, we'd not be at this pass the night! There's a wheen of common-sense in auld-fashioned ways, that's sore lackin', I'm thinking, in the new-fangle school. What with their experiment with the pure poison, their dosimetric, as they call it, and their shutting a poor patient up as if he were a madman—and those tawpies of nursing bodies—Hech, and I was glad to see that honest mannie, Duncan, in yonder, again. Oh, it's not that I'd be setting myself up ag'in' the faculty——"

James said, meekly, that he had had nothing to do with it. The other nodded and pursed his lips.

"Weel, we're all under Providence. And maybe you'll

agree with me so far, for all you're become a papist——"

"I want to know," said James desperately, "is there any chance, I mean of prolonging——"

"Don't be thinking of that—" said the old man, earnestly. He caught the priest's cold hand with a grip. "Go in to him. Give him all the comfort you can. Puir lad, he needs it. There is the bit flicker-up before the end. He's more himself tonight, I see. But don't build on it. Aye, I'm thinking he'll pass the night—this is a sair afflicted house! I'm hearing his lordship's gone."

It was, perhaps, what the doctor described as the "flicker-up before the end" that gave the Master the air of quickened vitality that James noticed as he took up his post again. The sick man's eyes glowed in their darkened orbits and his voice was stronger.

"No talking tonight, Jimmy. I've got to keep myself. Sit there if you like, though—sit and will me, or sit and pray me alive a night longer."

James took a chair at the foot of the bed.

It seemed to him as if the day had been a dream and it was the same night-watch still; as if he had never left the room. Only the winds now were still. And through the open window the air came in touched with the purity of frost. Between the casements there was a glimmer of stars in a clear sky. It was a night upon which sounds travel far. The throbbing start of the car which was to fetch Morna at the junction, and the gathering roll of its speed down the avenue, the faint far hoot, as it neared the lodge gate, a mile away, were struck out on the night's silence with the minute precision of an etching. James anxiously watched the bed: there was no stir from it. Did Ian



hear and understand? he wondered, he seemed so far away.

Silence deepened, within and without. The waters of the burn clamored as they rushed down the glen. James' thought traveled back to the night when his brother had fetched him from the chapel at Craigstoun, and had hurried him to the moors. "How the burn is talking!" he had said. The burn was talking tonight.

Propped up against his pillows, so as to be almost sitting, the Master lay, his eyes wide open, fixed. What was he looking at? What vision of past or future? Then a deer called, somewhere behind the hill. It was the sound that had driven him to madness, that night of strange revelations. The madness had left him. All the wild clamor of that passionate nature was stilled. James was conscious of a very human pain clutching his heart. How little time it was, since he had stood to watch his brother come leaping up the hillside, with the spring of a mountain stag! How short a time since Ian, all pulsing energy, had raced across the moorland ahead of him; since that heart had beat the hammer-strokes of ravaging passion under his hand!

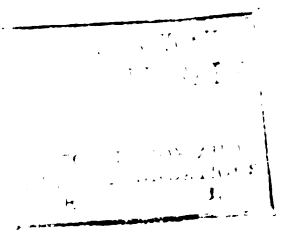
Ian, then, had been too much alive, torn by his own vitality; by his own strength of emotion, his ardors, his longings, his love and his fury. But a little while, and there he lay! A breath so shallow and flickering passing between his lips that it seemed scarce possible it could feed existence! There he lay, refusing himself to speech, lest his force expend itself in the effort of a word.

So short a time, so filled with varied sorrows, all leading to this one culminating irredeemable anguish! Thus the





"His glance . . . fixed itself upon her face with a most profound and vivid expression."



human cried out in James. It was Ian who presently, as if he had read in his thoughts, lifted the spirit of his priest-brother once more toward the light.

"Jimmy," he said, "I am content. Nothing could be better. I'll see Moran again—and after that I'll go. I couldn't have lived on, after that. It's—it's blessed!"

Then he asked the time—it was nearing midnight—and then for some of the stimulant left ready by the Doctor.

As James was about to replace the empty glass, the Master caught his hand.

"Never lose sight of her, Jimmy. . . . Teach her!"

"Ian," said James, "I will teach her one thing: that you and she will meet again—Ianny, dear, we shall all three meet——"

More he could not say: there was a dreadful choking at his throat.

When he went back to his seat, a fever of impatience burned in his veins. The minutes of this last hour before her arrival were dropping away to their final score. His ear was strained to catch the first sound of the horn. The gaze he fixed upon the bed was strained, too, in poignant apprehension. And Ian, who had been so impatient all his life; so restless and restive, lay in a great patience. James told himself that the dying man was upheld by a consciousness of fulfilment.

His own pulses well nigh stopped beating when, far away in that outer star-pierced darkness, where all the wide lands of Stronaven seemed to be waiting and watching, came the sound he was so intently expecting. He glanced at the bed. Could Ian bear it?



The Master smiled at his brother.

"Go down and meet her, Jimmy."

The fret and whirr of the car was growing toward them, like the buzzing of some gigantic bee. James hesitated.

"Go down," repeated Ian. "I'm all right. Well—send in Duncan. He's out there, isn't he?"

As James stumbled in haste from the room, Duncan was indeed sitting, crouched against the frame of the door. He sprang up, and went straight in. Words were not needed.

James reached the hall just as the car swept to its arrest outside. He flung open the unbarred door. He was glad that none but himself should be there to receive her.

Morna, wrapped in a traveling cloak, came swiftly in. She did not speak. But, at sight of James, paused in her rushing advance, and flung back the gauze veil that covered her face. Her eyes questioned.

"He is in your old room," he said.

Urgency of haste drove them both. Still without a word she sped by him with unfaltering step across the hall and up the stairs. Halfway she cast her cloak from her; and reaching the passage, paused for a moment to unwind the veil from her head and fling it, with her traveling cap, on a table.

Oenone came quickly out of the nurse's room. Her small face looked pinched and eager. Her hair was ruffled; she was holding a loose wrapper about her. She put out her hand and opened her lips to speak—but Morna passed by her, as if she had not been there, opened the door of Ian's room and went in. Her movements were so swift that Oenone was left standing with oustretched hand.

James advanced, took her arm with kind pressure to lead her away. But she clutched him.

"Hush!" she whispered. "I must hear!"

Within the room two voices were speaking close upon each other; and each but one word:

"Ian!"

"Morna . . . !"

It was the gentlest sound of greeting imaginable. No outcry. No surprise.

In such quiet, everyday manner, husband and wife might turn to each other, who had never been parted.

Duncan came out and shut the door—and he seemed to be shutting in a deep silence.

"Oh!" cried Oenone.

She snatched her arm from James' clasp; and then caught him again, and with more show of passion and impetuosity than he had yet known in her, swept him into the firelight spaces of his own room.

"Oh!" she cried again. "I *am* disappointed! Is that all? Well, I do feel sold! I thought there'd have been such a wonderful meeting! He seemed to care so dreadfully! Didn't he care, really? . . . Did he know she was coming? How was it? Oh, perhaps he's too ill to care any more. Oh, James, I feel I've made a fool of myself . . . all for nothing!" There were tears welling in her eyes. "I thought it was going to be so wonderful," she repeated, "like things you read of—overwhelming and—and—Oh, passionate!"

The priest stood looking at her, he could scarcely follow her. His mind and heart were too full. To him the fashion in which those two had come together, after all,



was entirely beautiful—in its naturalness, in its inevitableness, in its simplicity. Their souls had seemed to him to meet and conjoin as two raindrops roll into one. At last he said, with difficulty:

"You will always be glad of what you have done."

"Oh, well," said the new Lady Stronaven pettishly, "I'll go to bed. I have been a fool, that's the end of it."

She went, clapping her little slippers, out of the room; languor and dissatisfaction in every step. But, after her usual fashion, she bethought herself of some further remark and came back to deliver it.

"I don't suppose," she said with a wistful glance, "he sent me any kind of a message when he heard what I'd done, did he?"

James wished he could remember the least phrase that might be construed into an acknowledgment. He had to remain silent.

"Oh, well!" She gathered her draperies closer about her, "I don't see where I come in, here, at all. It's awfully odd, when you come to think of it! Did you see the way she just walked across me? And I keeping myself awake—and looking forward so much—and turning the nurses out of the room there for her, and getting it all ready—so comfortable." The corners of her lips trembled downward. "I think I'm every kind of a fool!" she said fretfully, and trailed away.

It was when the dawn was breaking that James heard the sharp ring of a hand-bell, followed by the opening of a door.

He sprang quickly from his knees. As he hurried out, Duncan met him.

"Mr. James, the Master's going."

There was a pungent scent of essences in the room. Morna was kneeling by the bed, one hand clasping her husband, the other supporting his pillows. Ian's head was flung back. James thought he was already dead. All the priest in him awoke and superseded even the brother. It was the soul, the soul that was his overwhelming concern.

Broken prayers escaped his lips as he bent over the bed. "God of clemency. . . . God of goodness. . . . O God, Who according to the multitude of Thy mercies forgivest the sins of such as repent. . . ."

Ian stirred, sighed, opened his eyes.

"Morna!"

She rose quickly, leaning toward him. His glance sought her, fixed itself upon her face with a most profound and vivid expression: his whole soul, on the brink of eternity, concentrating into that last gaze. She caught up the little cross that lay beside his pillow; her voice rang out piercingly:

"Ah, not at me—not at me, beloved! Look at the cross!"

Ian heard that cry, wherein love triumphed over itself. He turned his gaze upon the pledge of life everlasting—and as he looked, exhaled his last breath.

So the day broke over the house of Stronaven, to find it without a chief.

Far away south, in the Gray City, the tenth Baron Stronaven lay, after long, lonely years, lonely in death and, in the Highland Castle, the seat of the ancient race,



only three knew as yet that he who, all unknown to himself, had held the family honors for so brief a time, lay likewise forever still.

Lost in the uncertainties of the future, the destinies of the name hung in abeyance upon a frail secret pulse of life: that mystery, that unborn child! Till time should fulfill itself, and son or daughter be given to the house, the Clan Ivor would know no chieftain, Stronaven would know no lord.

And the stormy heart that had beaten itself out was quiet at last. Ian's face, settling ever more into that majesty which Death vouchsafes, as if to stamp even the abandoned clay with some of the beauty of the emancipated spirit, wore a faint smile. There was a great serenity about him.

Morna, with hands that trembled not, had laid him gently back, removing those massed pillows, useless now.

It was she who closed his eyes. She put between his hands the little cross: then she knelt again. James prayed on with interrupted phrases—sometimes speaking the words out loud, sometimes to himself, in too ardent an absorption to be conscious of anything but his own supplication. Duncan was on his knees by the door, which he kept open, with one hand, according to the vague tradition of the mountain people.

The day broke gloriously in opal fires over the moor.

"No one must touch him but us who love him," Morna said; "and no one must watch him but his own."

She was astonishingly calm. She let James lead her to her room, by and by, and consented to rest on the promise that she should return in an hour.

"He is mine again, now. He is mine forever," she said. "There is nothing but gratitude in my heart."

Proud and beautiful, the white flame of the soul shining out from her, she stood. The priest looked upon her with wise, pitying eyes: he knew that uplifting of supernatural strength and all the deeps and agonies that lay beyond it. But as he looked, a certainty came that was like balm: he remembered how she had, as it were, caught Ian's soul and flung it upon the mercy of Christ.

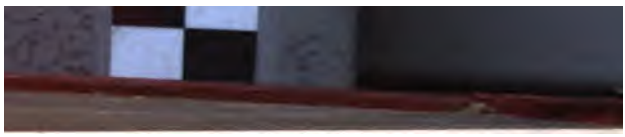
Let the future hold what it would, he told himself, she could never again be a "forlorn adventurer."

CHAPTER V

THE Duvenant element withdrew into itself, and the life of the west tower of Stronaven was disassociated from the death chamber and its watchers in the east tower, as completely as if no freak of fate had ever forged a link between them.

Oenone's instinct was to avoid the sight of anything painful. In any circumstances it would have been difficult to induce her to look upon the face of death. In the present conditions which she herself had helped to make so singular, her attitude of withdrawal, if it seemed to pass for an added generosity, was in reality the only possible one to her nature.

Mrs. Duvenant endured throes of indecision and anxiety upon the subject; but a sense of burning injury against the dead man, and the fear lest any intercourse between Morna and Oenone should make the intolerable



situation become public knowledge, urged her to uphold the policy of isolation.

In the Duvenant's half of the castle, therefore, it was officially given out that the new Lady Stronaven suffered from shock and was too seriously indisposed to leave her chamber.

And so existence went on, in those heated, scented rooms, with all the obtrusive luxury, and the smooth opulence of the new régime. And there was little to connect it with the east wing and the great, quiet sorrow it held, except indeed the telegrams that flew backward and forward to the fashionable shops in Edinburgh and London, the boxes containing the last creations in mourning that were continually arriving—some accompanied by capable young women with expressions demurely composed to match their wares—except for the endless correspondence which Mrs. Duvenant was pouring out to her extensive acquaintance; and, finally, for the fact that mother and daughter were served, with extra dainty meals, in the latter's boudoir.

From the household of fine London servants, the identity of that midnight visitor was jealously kept. And if scandalized whispers and gossip on the subject passed among themselves, it was not that elaborate explanations had been lacking to account for her presence. These were officially spread through the ladies' maids, by Mrs. Duvenant's orders.

A cousin of the late Lord Stronaven who had been brought up as a sister—summoned from abroad by Father MacIvor. It was a statement which had the advantage of being at any rate a substantial part of the truth.

On the other side, where, in little groups of twos and threes, Ian's own people came up the bare stairs with muffled tread, and into the darkened chamber to gaze their last upon their chieftain, if it was guessed, if it was impossible to doubt who it was that knelt, enveloped in mourning veils beside her dead, there was not one who would have allowed the name to cross his lips.

Morna had spread over the bed those draperies of purple and silver that had been Ian's gift to her. And he rested in unearthly beauty, the peace deepening on his countenance. Duncan had brought in sprays of the wild myrtle and laid them on the pillow.

On the morning of the Master's funeral, at point of day, the sons of the clan began to gather, silent and grave, in the courtyard of Stronaven—he would always remain now just the Master, to them. Some had started in the middle of the night from distant glens, from far-away crofts, high up on the hills. All who could had donned the tartan, proud of the distinction that linked them to the noble house and the old tradition. Each tenant of standing claimed the ancient privilege of carrying their chieftain upon his last journey. The coffin was oak of the home woods, planed and joined by the hands of one whose forbears had served the family for generations. It was covered by no pall—save the dead man's plaid—and Duncan walked just in front, as proud as a man could be with so sore a heart. Had not the Master himself said that he and he alone should play the coronach for him.

The strains of the lament of Ivor wound down the woodland roads and up the glen with wild and piercing sadness. All the spirit of the Highlands rang in that voice



of mourning: passionate, untutored, untamed, savage in its intensity. In the same voice, for centuries, the clans had bewailed their chiefs: it was a cry ringing down through the ages.

The sound of many feet beat slow, measured rhythm to the skirling of the pipes. It was slowly, very slowly, as if reluctant to lay down that honored burden, that the mourners of Ivor passed out upon the moor and began the ascent toward the ruins. All were humble, of the soil, save only those two who side by side paced behind the coffin: the woman in her black, wrapped and veiled, and the priest.

The sky was faintly blue; the mists had been lifting under their feet as they started. There was sunshine upon the open grave as they reached the chapel ruin. The grave was lined with the wild myrtle; and the scent of it rose pungently as the coffin was lowered, crushing down upon it.

The minister from Ballocheroch poured forth prayer very fervently, and there was a great fervor in the minds of those who crowded within the ruins or stood respectfully without. And many had wet eyes and more still bit back their tears and felt them burn at their heart. For the Master had been beloved for a generous lord—and he had been their own.

All was over; and the raw mound, now heaped with fir boughs and wild myrtle, looked green and kindly in the sunshine before the castle bell rang out the hour of nine, in the distance beyond the woods.

The crowd dispersed in groups, quietly taking their

way back to the castle, led by Duncan, who, as foster-brother, was chosen to dispense the Master's last hospitality.

Morna and James were left alone by the grave. The wind blew keen and free from the hills across the roofless walls. The cry of the moor birds circled and was lost. The blue deepened in the heavens. All had been done as Ian had foreseen and bidden.

And now the dreadful hour had struck when there was no more to do; the hour when the waters of bitterness rush upon the soul. Morna slowly put from her the veil that had hidden her face and cast herself upon the grave, pressing her cheek against the fragrant boughs. James knew that no words he could say would reach her; that it must break over her, wave after wave, this irresistible tide, overwhelming every faculty of mind and spirit, every spring of hope, the warmth of life itself.

He knew that to the limitless sorrow of her loss was added the voice of that remorse which, now for as long as the earth held her, would never cease its clamor at her heart. She lay, without moving, save for the shuddering sighs that escaped her now and again.

This hour of first communion with the inevitable had to be gone through. James knew; and he would fain have given her time, fain have waited, have avoided intrusion at least, since he could not help. But another duty pressed on him urgently. He had seen his brother laid to rest: he had yet to render the last honors to his father.

He came round to her and, kneeling beside her, touched the hand which lay outflung. She started and lifted her



head. He thought that Ian's face, as he'd last seen it, had not looked so reft of life—on Ian's face there had been peace!

"Morna, we cannot stay here. I must take you away."

"Where?"

"You cannot go back to Stronaven—now, without him."

She shook her head. A terror was gathering in her eyes.

"Must I—must I leave this?" She sat up against the grave and moved her hand on it, caressing. The gesture cried to him as no speech could have done—the cry of her desolation: "It's all I have."

"I'll bring you to Craigstoun. They are kind people, and they want you. . . . And you can come here, always."

She made a further movement to rise, but remained kneeling, her hands interlocked.

"I will come," she said, as if speaking to herself.

"The other funeral will be in two days—after that I will come to you at Craigstoun."

She bent and kissed the mound and then kissed it again, her arms embracing it. He thought, he almost hoped, she might break down. But, as once before in the torment of wrath, so now in the intensity of human grief, the fountain of years was sealed.

She got up and went with him, out through the ruined archway. But there, as if her heart lay buried and she were drawn back by its strings, she stopped and clung to the stone, her gaze turned to the grave.

"Look up, Morna," said he quickly.

She obeyed and above those roofless walls shone the

serene heavens; it was like balm upon the wound—the blue, the peace, the radiance over the grave.

Halfway down the hill, as they neared the burn, she spoke:

"Only four days ago, I was hurrying, hurrying, here. And then, when we were together at last, I said nothing. I could not. It all seemed to go away. There was no one in the world but him and me. There was nothing left but just our love."

"But that was best," he said.

"Yes," she answered him, and there was a dry sob in her voice. "Yes, I thought so. But now I don't know. Oh, James, I never even asked him to forgive me—I never told him that I forgave him!"

"That was not needed between you."

"Oh, no—not then." The sob caught her throat again. "But now, now I want it!"

"Morna, less than ever is it needed now."

So he tried to comfort her. But he understood: she wanted words to treasure, in the loneliness of her heart; precious words of reconciliation, or understanding, of love—all she had was the great silence. That silence had been full of love—but it also had been full of death. It was not enough now for her desolate humanity.

When they reached the rough road that skirted the glen, she stopped suddenly and fixed him:

"James, it is you who are now Lord Stronaven, it is you now who are master here."

She saw the stricken look on his face. He had dreaded the moment of inevitable revelation; had hoped to delay



it at least. Coming straight from the new grave, it was intolerably chosen. She misunderstood his misery:

"Oh, poor, poor James! I know how you feel. How terrible it is to you! How much it adds to the sorrow but——"

He interrupted her, the color flaming into his face:

"Morna, my dear, I—I don't know how to tell you!"

Her gaze became filled with astonished questioning.

He had to say it:

"There may be a son to inherit—" Then, characteristically, he amended the too vague statement: "The child that is to be born may be a son."

She repeated the words voicelessly: "The child that is to be born," and then turned so deathly white that he thought she was about to fall. He put out his hand; but she thrust it from her fiercely; took a few headlong steps and struck against a tree. Then she stood, pressing her forehead against the bark, her face averted. If ever there was a plight that commanded the respect of silence, surely it was hers.

At last she straightened herself and wheeled round; her face was set.

"Let us go on," she said briefly. But after they had stepped together a while dumbly, she cried:

"It means I must go back to Italy—I must go away and—leave his grave!"

"I don't think they will be much up here now," faltered James:

She interrupted.

"I couldn't—I must go! I thought I could not suffer any more. But, Oh, I can."

"I know it's very hard," he said after a pause. "I suppose it's the hardest thing you could have to bear now. But remember, Morna, how you bid him look at the cross——"

He heard her catch her breath, and, driven by that straight, stern conscience of his, went on:

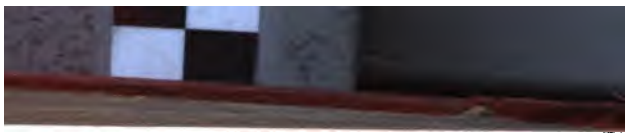
"You must not think of her in bitterness. Her wrong to you was all involuntary. The good she did you was of her own will. Remember, it was she who sent for you."

"Oh, I know, I know——"

Morna stood still again. Then he saw her sway as if caught by a strong wind.

"She was good. The wrong was all mine. If I am punished I deserve it. Oh, James, I am beaten every way!" Then the sobs rent her, and the tears came at last.

He left her in the chapel at Craigstoun to cry her heart out, pitifully glad that she could cry.



EPILOGUE

WHEN Mrs. Duvenant heard that her grandchild was a girl, she felt that the House of Stronaven had offered its final insult to her family. But it was not long before she began to discover compensations.

Oenone had prophesied that she "could very well like a little ba-by," and the prophecy came true. She was amused, delighted; beyond expectation taken up with the new interest. She bloomed and expanded into joyousness. All the recent fretfulness and languors disappeared. Unexpectedly Mrs. Duvenant found out that her daughter had never wished for a son; had dreaded the obligations that would have been laid upon her as mother of the heir; had indeed loathed with secret terrors the thought of being obliged to return to Stronaven, the old castle that frowned in her memory as a place of gloom, incomprehensible passion and death.

And when the grandmother began to trace delicate family resemblances in the pretty, thriving babe, it not only came to be regarded by her as the means of restoring Oenone to the zest of life, but as a creature most precious for its own sake. Furthermore, one day the good lady arrived at the pleasing conclusion that her daughter—

unless she chose to take a step higher in rank—being the one and only Lady Stronaven as long as James lived, the birth of a son might have detracted from, rather than heightened, this desirable position.

"My Nonny will never be the dowager now, whatever happens!" she said to herself. "And as the girlie will be a beauty, there's no knowing what alliance we may not one day make."

Life stretched out once more before the Duvenants in handsomely illumined perspectives. And while the coronet loomed ever large and brilliant, Stronaven itself and all it had once meant to them sank into the background—a forgotten shadow.

It is a far cry from the wild hills of Avenside to the orange-hung slopes of Santa Maddalena; from the moor and the glen, the crags and the tarn, to those shores steeped in sunshine, washed by sapphire seas, sparkling, wreathed in color.

In the chapel of the ancient family of d'Este, sheltered by the round-arched Ligurian church, stands the monument of that bygone son of the race who died in the year of the Black Death—a shrine rich with marble inlay, with delicate carving and gilding, with alabaster and bronze.

And far away north, out on the forlorn Scotch hillside, four gray roofless walls, all that is left of what was once the House of God, surround a new tomb of granite, gray also and simple to severity.

Nothing could seem less likely than a link between these resting-places; between the image of the Italian boy, stretched these centuries just as Death caught him in his

young beauty, all in immortal stone, within the incense-haunted sanctuary, and that stern weight of hewn rock open to the sun and the rain, pressing upon the dust of a Highland heart that broke itself in storm only a year ago.

Yet there are two in whose minds they are indissolubly associated—the silent pale woman in unchanging black, who lives in the east tower of the castle of Stronaven, and the kindly anxious priest who comes and goes at long intervals. Incongruously the tenants of Stronaven call the one "Her Ladyship," and the other—although he is their rightful lord and chieftain—by preference, Mr. James.

Now, to these two, the grave in the ruined chapel is the most sacred spot on earth, and never do either of them kneel beside it without a memory of the d'Este tomb. It is a memory which brings comfort. Over the carven beauty of the young Genoese noble there leans, in austere tenderness, the image of the Redeemer. Where the Master of Stronaven lies under the stone, the skies of his native land alone look down—blue serenity of summer, driving storm-clouds, or pure remote starlight. But the words that are written, whether on Italian marble or on Scottish granite, are the same:

EXPECTO RESURRECTIONEM MORTUORUM ET VITAM VENTURI SAECULI.





